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A magazine of literature and the arts

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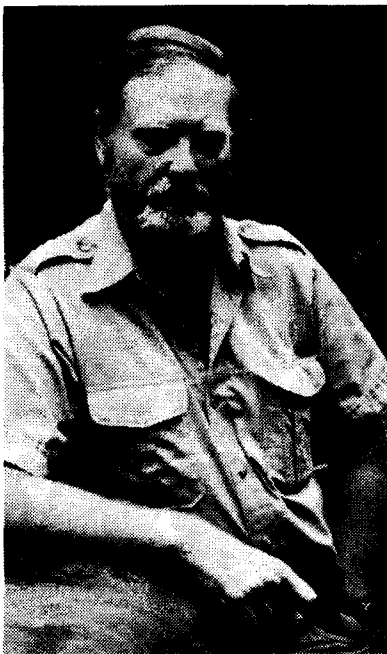
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—Hayden Carruth

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TO OUR READERS

We are making our "Reports" section a regular feature. In this issue there are letters from three American vacation spots (or unvacation spots, as the case may be). We plan to continue bringing you reports from all over the world. Be on the lookout.

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Reports: Summer of '83

DEAN FLOWER

Wellfleet Visions

Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.
—Hart Crane

YOU CAN ALWAYS STAY ON ROUTE 6 and drive on into Wellfleet center. People gather on the shady lawn of the town hall, go to Hatch's for fresh fish and wisecracks, drift in and out of the grocery and the Spirit Shoppe, still wearing wet bathing suits, their ankles crusted with sand. By midsummer the sidewalks are clustered with people you'd swear you saw last summer at Ogunquit or the Vineyard. Pointedly unselfconscious in their frayed, bleached, cut-off, and hastily flung-on apparel, they smile or frown in direct proportion to hours squandered at the beach and measure success in the language of Coppertone and Bain de Soleil. Bookish tourists, distinctly paler, will amble over to the nearby Historical Society (open afternoons), listen to the bells of the First Congregational Church striking ship's time, wonder which house was the late Edmund Wilson's, or drive out Chequesset Neck Road in search of the Herring River where Thoreau's funny sketch about a Wellfleet Oysterman took place. Meanwhile the well-heeled enthusiast of art can stroll into more than a dozen galleries willing to sell him views of the very rocks and gulls he just saw down at the Town Pier. Collectors of place names will have to sort through specimens like "Aesop's Tables" and "Twice Sold Tales" before discovering this witty highway sign: "Pleasure Point / Paine Hollow." Wellfleet is small-scale and unpretending, neither gussied up with historic preservation nor veneered with new money. It's as thoroughly nice a town as the Cape has to offer.

But if you leave Route 6 at the South Wellfleet General Store (where you can buy whatever you forgot, put air in your tires, check the tide times, and mail a letter), everything changes. At once the din of traffic drops away; you begin to hear a freshening breeze in the scrub oaks and pines; soon the little gray cottages disappear, and the road winds through a gentle terrain of gray-green weather-beaten heather and shrub, beach plum and wild

Josephine Miles



Photo: Joseph Bell

Collected Poems, 1930-83

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rose. In less than a mile you've reached the more-or-less nameless beach. The town has given them names, all right—Maguire's Landing, Marconi, White Crest, Cahoon Hollow—but what you see is miles of tawny sand dune curving away north and south, and at your feet a drop of thirty yards or more to the immemorial beach. Standing at this point on a sunny summer morning, I don't envy stout Cortez silent upon a peak anywhere. The sky is fathomless, the ocean illimitable. On a clear day the horizon seems a flawless enigmatic rule, with a few toy boats for scale. The searching eye comes in again, tracing the paths of glittering light, to see where the waves begin to mount and slowly gather speed. What could be more anonymous, predictable, and beautiful after all? Sun, sand, blue sky, and ceaseless waves.

I study the surf eagerly. If there is a moderate swell running and the tide is low enough, the body-surfing could be good. Easterners call it "wave-riding": they stand in shallow water to wait for a big one, then throw themselves earnestly into the wave as it breaks, with head down and both arms extended, torpedo-style, or else they thrash and flail as the wave crests over them. Held under and pummeled by a good-sized breaker for a time, they soon stagger happily to their feet, bathing suits full of sand. Body-surfing is another matter. You must study the waves first: where are the invisible sand bars creating the best-shaped shoulder in which to ride? Will you slide left or right? Are the best waves breaking outside? Will that trough near the shore cut short the ride? You swim out to the chosen spot, tread water and maneuver for position, take one quick stroke and kick when the wave looms up, then with both arms at your sides, head up, shoulders rounded slightly, you plane like a surfboard in the breaking wave, keeping just ahead of the collapse, and ride it all the way to shallow water. Instead of the ignominious sprawl, you do a flip turn and swim back out for an even better wave. No matter how icy the water always is, even on the warmest Cape Cod summer days, my skin numbs quickly and I stay magically warm, scanning the horizon for the next set, held by the waves' hypnotic lift and fall. Am I looking east toward Spain or west into the setting sun when the next wave hulks up almost black? I dive under it and come up a little panicky, checking my distance from the jutting rocks of Pleasure Cove, my arms for a moment snagged in kelp, the water a white boil that seems to pull me down. Where am I? Wellfleet is gone and memory brings me up half-drowned in California surf. Memorable first lesson: don't look back at the misty shore of Santa Cruz, with all those houses crowded at the edge of East Cliff Drive; keep your eyes on the restless, threatening Pacific. A veteran of lakes and overheated pools, I am a rank beginner here in these frigid northern currents. Tasting the unfamiliar salt and blinking away the brine, I learn to read the waves. Phrases from

Melville and Hart Crane echo with that first experience in the ocean; the voice I hear is Yvor Winters', gruff and low: *The bottom of the sea is cruel . . . Heed it well, ye Pantheists! . . . Still one shore beyond desire . . . One insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life.* But the real thing immersed and held me that day, eager Stanford graduate student that I was. Elation did not subside; and I remember drinking sherry that night (it went right to my head) and feeling still the powers of the sea.

Wellfleet beaches permit a lot of privacy, even on hot midsummer weekends. Radios, kites, frisbees, stench of beer and coconut oil can all be distanced quickly with a brisk walk. You can look for ducks and frigate birds among the herring and laughing gulls. Do not disturb the terns, nesting nearby in shallow troughs of sand; and DANGER, do not climb the dune—both bird and cliff are threatened most by man. Conceivably in spring or fall you could see a whale from here; their summer feeding grounds are thirty miles north and west. More likely you'll glimpse no spirit-spout but only white buoys, marking lobster pots. At last you stop and spread your blanket at a place chosen by invisible marks and clues: how far from shore, how near that grass or driftwood branch, how angled to the sun—these minor mysteries are settled long before today. Stretch out and close your eyes, and be the thrall of the relentless sun. Where are you now but on that shimmering beach of childhood, where everything stays bright and fresh forever? After the first beach, I think, there is no other. My mother and brother have just spread the Army blanket in a nice empty spot on Bradford Beach. The Milwaukee Water Filtration Plant is a half-mile off to the north; to the south lies that rickety wooden marvel, the bath-house, with its unreachable showers, the wire basket for your clothes (don't lose the pin), and stalls where you forgot your soggy suit. I remember no food from the snack bar there, only those oozy spirals of flypaper hanging down, heavy with dead flies. Lake Michigan in memory is perfectly crystalline and breathtakingly cold. I watch my hands walking the bottom ("Look at me, I can swim!") as I wriggle in the shallows. How quickly my lips turn blue with cold, and everybody tells me to get out. After shivering in my towel awhile, I and my brother dig lakes in the sand; my mother smokes Lucky Strikes and pencil sketches nearby figures. Soon we are hungry, sunburned, and tired: "We just got here, why do we have to go so soon?" Three sharp memories of Bradford Beach converge on me now, images of a somewhat later time when I was twelve. One day we watched a man walk queerly back and forth at an odd angle across the beach, in solemn and endless ritual turning his torso just so to improve his perfect tan. Another day was partly spoiled by men grimly rowing a dory a short way out, dragging with grappling hooks for some-

one drowned. Perhaps that was the same day we noticed a sharp-eyed old woman in a faded bathing dress, patiently prowling up and down the sand, searching for what? She stooped over. Ah, money. I tried and failed to find some too.

On the Bay side of Wellfleet, according to the Chamber of Commerce pamphlet, "Sheltered dunes and beaches create an illusion of privacy." The illusion apparently convinces many, for nude sun-bathing is popular at Duck Harbor Beach. You may like the calmer, warmer water there, but the little dells and coves of privacy are regularly interrupted by the sudden appearance of sweaty-faced hikers, or by the way a distant hillside post turns out to be an artist at his easel, patiently painting you into his picture. If you stay on the Atlantic side, all manner of walkers, joggers, runners, and beachcombers pass by and hardly notice you. Last summer we saw each day a man in lemon-yellow trunks go past from left to right; two hours later he trudged from right to left, a metronomic zombie, his rigid torso toasted to a perfectly perfect brown. I am confident his avatars were seen in ancient days by emperor and clown, and will be seen till doomsday, catching the final rays of sun.

One day when the waves were good, not far from where Marconi sent the first transatlantic message to the King of England in 1903, I was treading water about thirty yards offshore, hoping for the biggest wave, when I saw a rounded back, perhaps a head face down. Staring appalled and sickened, I knew it was a drowned body. Then it turned, and twenty feet away I looked into the bulging eyes and spiky moustache of a seal. Impossible to say which of us was more surprised: we simply stared. I like to think we exchanged a look of recognition, our eyes grappling briefly with each other's mystery.

After the storm surf and tides of winter re-carve the shore each year, the beachcomber may find eloquent treasures—sand-blasted bottles, fragments of lobster pot, huge timbers splintered in a gale, a broken spar with a bit of twisted nylon rope, pieces of Day-Glow-orange cork and styrofoam, a heavy leather boot, a good supply of mateless rubber gloves, the skeletons of skates and rays (all picked so clean, they look like models for a science class). I always check the stoppered bottles, which have contained no messages so far. I like the weather-ravaged look of all these things, each carefully salted and thrown on shore. Far beyond the reach of waves one day, I found myself walking along one of the sandy tracks that wind everywhere through the South Wellfleet woods. Something glinted in the sand—a bottle cap or button? I stooped to pick it up: a coin no less, its edges crimped and face half worn away but very legible. But coin of what realm was this? FERDIN. VII. DEI. GRATIA. 1818. There was the outline of a head, a ribbon at the nape, a Roman-looking nose and toga. I gaped and turned it over: HISPAN. ET. IND. REX. ME. 2 R. J. P. This side

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clearly showed two pillars, an escutcheon with castles and two lions rampant, and a crown above. It seemed to be two reales silver from the royal court of Ferdinand the Seventh of Spain. But whence came this fabulous artifact? Perhaps this was the coin I began to look for in the sand of Bradford Beach, an Ishmael of a coin, a castaway, that somehow wandered from the old world to the new as if to prove that past and present may be deeply inter-fused. Rubbing the coin, my magic wafer, I returned to the Atlantic shore that night, and stared further out than ever.

ALICE BLOOM

Letter from unVacationland

FOR YEARS MY MOTHER'S FAVORITE JOKE has been the one about the old farmer who, finally facing the fact that his wife is raving mad, calls the State Asylum to come take her away. As the attendants are strapping her into the padded wagon, the farmer scratches his head and says, "Gee, I just can't figure out how Maw coulda gone crazy. Why, she hasn't even been out of the kitchen for forty years."

Pick-Ur-Own signs begin to go up along our country roadsides early in June, beginning with Beet Greens, Spinach, then Strawberries, Peas, Red Raspberries, Pickling Cukes, Blueberries, Beans, Corn, Plums, Pears, and at the end, Apples of many kinds.

Two midwestern ladies on vacation together this summer, two of the five million "visitors" this state of less than one million "invites" each year, refuse to pay for their lobster lunch at a coastal restaurant because the lobster has "funny green stuff" inside. They are adamant. Explanations from the kitchen do not prevail. They've had lobster plenty of times before, they tell the manager, and never have they seen "green stuff" till now. At last a local policeman is called in and he, according to the (delighted) local newspaper accounts, patiently explains to the ladies that "green stuff" is more properly called "tomalley," is considered a delicacy by many, and anyhow it comes, being the very guts of it, in every Maine lobster.

As Puritans and other old-timers well knew, green stuff is the guts of everything in Maine and what's more, it is always on the

move against the human clearing. "Sixty years ago," an old native told me, "this town was beautiful, all cleared fields, you could see right from here to Kent's Hill, and look at it now, it's a mess, all trees, just nothing but trees." Today, first of September, green stuff takes the form of ten cords of uncut, unsplit birch and oak dumped in our sideyard to feed, once it's cut, split, and stacked, two stoves this coming winter. By early fall, the Pick-Ur-Own is stashed away or eaten, until apples, but our own vegetable patch is on the march toward the kitchen door, armed with large, soft tomatoes and baseball-bat sized zucchini. Despite our efforts with ax, clippers, and scythe in the spring, the alders and maple saplings and some Laocoön of a vine have taken over, once more, the meadow behind the chicken yard. The new roof is on the house, though, and the new septic field dug, new pipe and fourteen concrete leeching chambers installed, covered, newly grassed over; but school began again this week for three of the household, and more guests are coming this month, they write: on Sabbatical, which green stuff never takes.

How tempting then, given this racket of bounty, to begin a letter from Maine with the well-ripened staple of female humorists since *The Egg And I*: what do I know about summer up here or anything else for that matter, what between the guests and the green stuff, I never get out of the kitchen. In ten years of living in Maine, however, I've learned quite a bit in the kitchen. It takes, for instance, two warm days for twenty quarts of unrefrigerated strawberries to attract fruit flies. It takes eight cups of blueberries to make two pies which, cut gingerly, will feed an unexpected seventeen. It takes one visiting city child, allowed the treat of gathering brown eggs from hot nests, four minutes to drop a basket containing a dozen and a half. It takes forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup and many Sunday nights of waffles to use that much. It takes twenty-six pints of bread and butter pickles to get through nine months of school lunches. It takes three cars to get through one winter because two out of the three will generally be broken down in one to four crucial places. Depending on how late in the season you pick the apples (the later, the drier the apple) it takes twelve to fifteen, fifty-pound feed sacks to make one fifty-gallon barrel of cider, and one backhoe, three sturdy men, and two good-sized logs to roll one barrel down into the cellar hole. It takes two field rats of opposite sex one autumn under the woodshed to ensure the existence of Rat until Doomsday. Later on, it will take seven weeks of commotion and rehearsal to get thirty-eight people, children's chorus included, organized to perform one night of *A Christmas Carol* for the tenth Annual Town Christmas Revels; and so on.

The view from the kitchen window is pretty damned decent, and would encourage one to go on cooking. All looks fairly right

with the world. Old friends, guests for the week, are playing and laughing in the backyard despite the drawbacks of the K-Mart badminton set. Their nice children, and ours, all of whom have good teeth, good grades, and play various musical instruments, have politely relinquished the rackets and birdies to the city-tired but newly playful adults, and are sitting at the picnic table with lemonade and (Laurel died) Hardy, the aged rabbit, who now and then makes a slumbrous, nervous jump at an oatmeal cooky. The children have also pulled a baby carrot for him, and behind this afternoon group, variously awaiting the dusk with its long lamp-lit table, sweaters, chickens marinated all day in lemon and garlic, good talk, fireflies and then stars, is the grey-green herb garden with its tidy, new, old-brick walk, good supply of basil this year, and lavender, and behind that a wash of yellow coreopsis and royal blue delphiniums and behind that, we're grateful, the new pear trees did survive after all a first winter of being bark-gnawed by mice. Trees surround us on every side, once fields, and in one of them, a nightly whippoorwill, around 8:30, does so rinse and wring the ear. Last night, returning home from a Farm League baseball game, there's a baby moose eating beneath the crabapple tree. For the moment, the cars are running, the roof job wasn't as much as we expected, a neighbor has just shown up with a blackberry tart and yes, she will stay for a round of badminton; and so out this kitchen window with its sleeping cat, its late sun, its pot of rosemary, its fresh wind, its fading blue-checked curtains, things look good and it's hard to remember, for the moment, that one of the badminton couples is quietly contemplating a divorce after fifteen relatively decent years and one of their nice children is suddenly having recurrent nightmares and bed-wetting; and that the friend blowing on the charcoals was just rejected by the tenure committee of a university he very much trusted to keep him; but still, despite these and other particular ills and not uncommon turns, we're held here together this summer afternoon, as if in the warm palm of a small, walled city.

What? what is this summer day in Maine? A tenth-century monastery, protecting herbs and manuscripts? A prolonged performance of *The Cherry Orchard*? A real life Country Chic shop? Just about, all of the above. Yet it's an assemblage of modest bits, all in all: backyard, lemonade, supper, pets, friends, the life that used to be reluctantly inherited in suites like living-room furniture, but which is now constructed stick by stick, folk art, whimsies, Victorian side-yard follies, miniature villages built with available scraps, quaint, an individual vision. "You're just escaping reality, you know," even good friends told us when we moved here. That has turned out to be not quite it, for on the one hand, we have never before faced so much reality, in the form of inexorable green stuff. And on the other, much of the reality we now

The Bourgeois Experience

Victoria to Freud

Volume I: Education of the Senses

PETER GAY

With this book, the renowned historian Peter Gay begins an enormously ambitious and imaginative undertaking: a multi-volume study of middle-class culture from the 1820s to the outbreak of World War I. Reinterpreting that history along psychoanalytic lines, *The Bourgeois Experience* will eventually comprise at least five volumes focusing on the role that sexuality, aggression, and conflict played in the attitudes and behavior of those people in many countries whom we now call "the Victorians."

Volume I, *Education of the Senses*, deals with how those individuals discovered sexuality, what they knew and what they repressed, and how outside pressures and realities impinged upon their erotic lives. Gay's conclusions overthrow some persistent stereotypes about the era and its middle classes; in particular, he strongly challenges the traditional notion that bourgeois women could not enjoy sexuality. His meticulous research has unearthed some fascinating items: one of his many primary sources is the journal of Mabel Loomis Todd, an American wife whose account of her longings and experiences serves as a surprising example of the sexual possibilities within the confines of bourgeois culture. Gay includes other case histories and much more as he explores such areas as pornography, attitudes toward women, infant mortality, the ideal of privacy, and contraceptives and abortion. The study is provocative, often moving, and endlessly absorbing.

A book of immense scope and insight, *Education of the Senses* marks an auspicious beginning for a project that promises to change the way we view the past.



Peter Gay is Durfee Professor of History at Yale University and author of many books, including *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*.

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Excerpt:

"Nineteenth-century bourgeois culture has not lost its capacity to astound. Much as we know, we know too little about it, and many wrong things. . . . The general perception of what is loosely, perhaps inescapably, called the Victorians, certainly needs drastic revision, poised as it is, awkwardly, between amusement over their earnestness and disdain for their prudery, between indignation at their hypocrisy and a slightly patronizing nostalgia for their engaging quaintness. For all the dependable researches and discriminating analyses that serious students of the past have lavished on that culture, it continues to invite the historian to explore its familiar terrain and to wrest new interpretations from its inexhaustible materials."



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face we have invented, which is much more cowardly and reprehensible than any escape. And on bad summer days, the view from the kitchen window, its pleasures toted up, seems a trifling decadence, irrelevant as a gift shop. We're poachers, cranks, decorators, dilettantes, gourmets, connoisseurs, hobbyists, and despite the ten cords of uncut wood, ivory tower dwellers to the teeth. Such invention is a by-product of the times, and even this is only possible because we're just barely still off the edge of the times, and thus, enormously privileged.

For a while yet. We live in what an ad in a recent Maine Publicity Bureau publication calls "the Other Maine . . . still undiscovered, still unspoiled . . . there are no crowds, no traffic jams, just fresh air and quiet and untouched natural beauty that has always waited, patiently, to be appreciated." Really? These alders don't look to me like they're waiting to be appreciated. They look like they want to grow right up against the windows, to me. Come inside, which they will do, have done in many abandoned farm kitchens along our undiscovered roads. Whatever, our summer day is advertised, and it won't be long before "Vacationland" resembles the "Garden State."

Tourists, though, even five million a year of them, and what wheedling and cluttering is done to coax their trade, only represent a runner, sent somewhat ahead of the marauding Times. They are out there, the awful, rotten, trashy, dangerous, ugly Times, and they are moving this way fast. No need to tote that up. The Monster Pig on the horizon, one friend calls it, and no amount of green stuff can obscure its approach.

No Jeremiah paces the backyard, nor our town's one main street, with a sign announcing the end; but even from the kitchen window, perhaps most especially from the kitchen window because what's inside feels these days so much in need of protection, it does look as though the world is ending. I perfectly well realize that my reasons for thinking the world is ending are someone else's reasons for thinking it's just getting good; that my cup of dark brew is someone else's Tequila Sunrise; that my idea of waste and danger is someone else's idea of a swell afternoon; and that there are those who think the installation, in many country towns in Maine this past year, of—just one Image from the Times—franchised "Family Arcades" in the spare back rooms of general stores, is the best thing since refrigerated beer. And they see nothing wrong either, and they say "So?" to the daily event of teenagers who spent last summer's after-school hours doing sports, homework, music, helping out around the place, grooming pet pigs for the 4-H exhibit at the fair, now loped and bent with fake-vicious, fake-cool faces over two-bit, three-minute "games" of killing or being killed, in a totally absorbing, eyeball-raking, ear-abusing Outer Space where reality's really at, in the ex-

citing blackness of painted-out windows in the back room (still smelling faintly of kerosene, chickenfeed, seed potatoes) from whose pink and red flashing, exploding, glamorous bowels they will soon be shot, store closing-time, out into the plain, much-resented, flat, sunset world of homework, stupid teachers, parents, chores, that dumb pig mewing for its meal, the tan pedestrian future in which, barring fatal car wreck or interstellar hand-to-hand combat, this just-experienced cacophony of thrills, speed, and daring will never be duplicated, into the real everyday 5:30 of us all; returning home, no monsters, no pink weapons, nothing flashing, and the mood of return blows along the dinky country black-top road outside the store like so many dirty candy wrappers, bits of hay ground into the dust and grime, vegetable tops, empty rolling cans, the Exxon sign squeaking in the wind, dull tomorrows, Mom's voice yelling supper out the blasted kitchen window. Ah shit, they say, and feel.

WILLIAM COLE

I'm Sick of Hearing About the Hamptons

ONE OF THE THINGS YEAR-ROUNDERS SAY in the Hamptons is, "God, I'll be glad when the summer people go! The traffic! And, y'know, there were thirty people meekly queued up at the News Company on Sunday morning waiting for the *Times*!" And one of the things the summer people say is, "I love it here—I see the same people here I see the rest of the year in the city."

There are two seasons out here: summer and the rest of the year. And two prices; a friend just rented a four-bedroom, three-bath house on a quiet Amagansett lane for the winter—mid-September to mid-May—for \$300 a month. Come late May the rental leaps to \$3000 a month—\$9000 for the summer.

The chief topics out here last summer, and any summer, are developers, traffic, pollution, and politics—and what people are saying about the Hamptons. There has been plenty of the latter, particularly when a ridiculous prime time suds opera exhibited itself on TV and slathered the network watchers with misinformation, including—which really rankled—reference to the East Hampton Hospital, of which there is none. If you get really sick out here on the South Fork, you're whisked off to the Southampton Hospital.

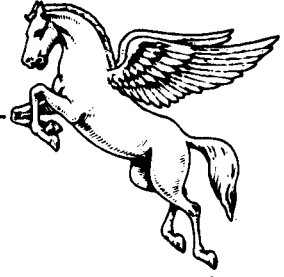
Southampton is the bigger of the two South Fork towns, with a year-round population of 45,000, which swells to 116,000 come summer. East Hampton has 15,000 in winter, and 55,000 in the hot months. The phrase “The Hamptons” embraces all of the South Fork of Long Island from the Shinnecock Canal eastward to Montauk. So far as I know, it doesn’t take in Westhampton and Hampton Bays, west of the Canal, which are thought a bit on the scuzzy side, and are not considered Hamptons.

The Hamptons are sometimes jokingly referred to as Mercedes Country, and, indeed, a gigantic new dealership in Mercedes and BMWs has just opened in Southampton, and in summer the roads are clogged with them. But after Labor Day they disappear from the roads; things shut down like a quickly drawn window blind, and the area becomes very much like any other town a hundred miles from New York City. There are plenty of people on welfare, and food stamps are seen with some currency. Aside from summer tourism, this is basically a community of agriculture and fishing—both threatened. As Paul Goldberger pointed out in a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, the land is going. A farmer cultivating an acre of potatoes can bring in perhaps a thousand dollars a year from the crop. He can sell that same acre of farmland for \$120,000. If he does, in a very short time an odd-looking summer house will appear amid the potato fields, and another view will be ruined.

There was a great hoo-ha late this summer when New York art dealer Ben Heller with his associates bought a thousand acres of prime East Hampton waterfront land, with the idea in mind of putting up some 400 houses. He hadn’t reckoned with the fact that the Planning Board was about to change the area to five-acre zoning, which would allow fewer houses to be erected. Incensed, he paid \$4500 for a three-and-a-quarter page ad in the local paper, in which he harangued the town fathers, and threatened to sue if the new zoning went through. If all else failed, he intimated that he’d sell the land to the town; land bought for six million that he’d offer to the town for sixteen. As of this writing, things are up in the air, but generally, zoning is erratic, and decisions seem to be made on the spur of the moment. Under the recent Republican administration, decisions seem to favor the developers.

As to fishing, the money crops are bay scallops—the season begins in late September—and, in the ocean, striped bass, although many other finfish are caught by the commercial fishermen. To the dismay of the haulseiners, the state has just passed a bill, strongly backed by a sportsfishing lobby, increasing the minimum size bass allowable from sixteen inches up to twenty-four, meaning that about half of every haul will have to be returned to the sea, which will pretty much put the haulseiners out of business, and add a further burden to the local economy.

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The farmers and the fishermen are the true locals, descendants of New Englanders who settled in the area in the mid-eighteenth century. They're known as Bonackers, after the Bonac Indians, and speak their own patois; you might hear a local saying something like, "Whut toime's the toide comin' in, Bub?"

During the summer there are plenty of jobs for everybody. The farmers go right on farming and the fishermen keep fishing. The other locals, and the children of the summer people, get work as waiters in the booming restaurants, do lawn maintenance, carpentering, or get positions as what the kids call rent-a-cops—temporary police whose time is devoted largely to putting tickets on cars that don't have beach stickers. And, of course, there's work in the shops. Southampton and East Hampton are being boutique'd to death, despite rents that double each year. Shopowners complain, but new units spring up each season, and there's always someone to fill them. New restaurants, with New York City prices, appear and disappear. Some few manage to stay open year round, if only on a Friday to Monday schedule, to cater to off-season weekenders. Many New Yorkers keep their houses open until Thanksgiving, then shut off the water and let the houses sit until things warm up in March or April.

The Hamptons seem to be the most-written-about piece of land in the United States. There have been recent articles displaying varying degrees of accuracy and gossip in *New York, Town & Country*, *Woman's Wear Daily*, the *National Geographic*, and even the English *Tatler*. The exposure promises to continue. Last spring a snappy controversy arose when an unmarried East Hampton high school teacher, Patricia Hope, was threatened with dismissal because she was, designedly, with child. There were letters and editorials in the local *Star*, and indeed, stories on the wire services, on network TV, and in every imaginable newspaper and magazine. In the end the forces of liberalism won out, and Miss Hope had her baby and retained her job. As an aftermath, television is currently threatening an on-the-location "docudrama" about the case, which it is to be hoped will be truer to the spirit of the area than the earlier nighttime soap opera.

The Hamptons used to be considered pretty rich and pretty stuffy, and pockets of stuffiness still remain, notably in the private Devon Yacht Club and the Maidstone Club, which have very strict membership policies. Each is reputed to have a few token Jewish members, but in neither has any black ever crossed any door but that of the kitchen.

As is true of the Cape and the Vineyard, artists and writers flock to the Hamptons every summer. In fact, there is a long-established Artists vs. Writers softball game each season which the writers usually win, perhaps because of the more sedentary character of the artists. There are also benefits—gosh, are there benefits!

C

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For politicians, for the Southampton Hospital, for the Animal Rescue Fund, for busy Guild Hall in East Hampton which has plays, movies, concerts all the year long. And, naturally, there are cocktail parties, which bring out what I call the Lawn People; these are the ones who stand on lawns clutching plastic glasses every summer Saturday evening from roughly five to eight. Mostly summer people, with a sprinkling of year-rounders and local professionals. If the party is predominantly literary, surely among the guests will be E. L. Doctorow, Betty Friedan, George Plimpton, Wilfrid Sheed, and Kurt Vonnegut. If the emphasis is artists, you'll see gallery owner Elaine Benson, Jimmy Ernst, Balcolm Green, Larry Rivers and Syd Solomon. Are they all talking literature and art? Not at all: new restaurants and boutiques, parking problems in the village, real estate prices, local scandal, and the best hour to leave for the city. This latter is a never-ending discussion: one man swears that it's best to get up at six on Monday morning to have a clear road, and another claims it best to leave on Sunday at nine P.M., "Because everybody *thinks* that everybody else will be on the road at that time—so they all leave earlier." It turns out that no matter how you handle the problem there will be times when you're bumper-to-bumper half the way to New York.

And, oh yes, at some time at any party someone will mention Dean & DeLuca, the classy food store that set up a few years ago in what used to be the East Hampton post office. This is a shop where an orange costs fifty cents, and the patés, pastries, smoked fish, cheese and caviar are sky-high. If you have a weekend visitor, the thing to do is to take him there on a sniffing tour; and who knows, he may succumb and spring for a tasty house present. I was in there once this summer, sniffing around, and encountered a friend to whom I owed five dollars. I gave it to her, and she responded, "Well, thanks—now I can buy a quarter-pound of something!"

I've been coming here summers and off-season weekends for thirty years, and the living is easy if you stay away from the specialty shops and restaurants, shop the supermarkets, and have a fisherman friend and a small garden. And, naturally, find a shack somewhere, or part of an inexpensive house to live in during the summer season. There are miles of the world's finest beaches, there are bays and harbors, woods and magnificent fields, and any kind of people you care to find. In fact, the Hamptons can be just like anywhere. But prettier.

C. B. COX

Passages to India

for Martin Banham and Yasmeen Lukmani

Nek Chand

At dawn I land
inside Le Corbusier
("civilisation needs right-angled brains").
I breathe in Chandigarh,
his radiant city,
gridiron on the hot plains.

When they opened
the concrete library
in monsoon rains
Indian hosts stood aghast:
"Monsieur Corbusier,
the ceiling leaks."

The great dictator,
no taste for local freaks
("man is a geometric animal")
murmured:
"It never rains
like this in France."

A rickshaw boy
wobbles me
past bullock carts
to see arcades of shops,
the master's dream
of straight-line elegance:

Sikhs and saris
lost in vast spaces,
cubes of blank concrete,
a community of angles,
smudged black,
crumbling now in oven heat.

I feel a rage
at planning arrogance.
Back in my hotel
I twist together verses
of bright bazaars
and pedlars in a curving street;

Then in Nek Chand's rock garden
life (as always)
surpasses my conceit.
A private man,
while the ship of state
turned dirty grey,

he built from rubbish,
among mosquitoes and smells,
a secret garden,
fetched on his bike
from mountain streams
galleries of bulbous rocks.

His invention burgeoned,
and today I bow
through low doorways
(no right angles here):
niches, nooks,
platforms of broken plates,

walls of a thousand plugs
like patterns of white lace,
women made from bangles,
bits of bowls for hats:
drinking a cup of tea,
a man of saucers.

The grottoes lead on and on,
mosque, amphitheatre,
bestiaries of wild design;
dolls in file gaze
fierce-eyed across the plain
at concrete office blocks.

So now Nek Chand
in Nehru's modern city,
only radiant here,
raises his hand, smiling;
from high rocks
hidden fountains tumble.

Lord Ganesh

In Sanskrit
a beautiful woman
walks
like an elephant
majestic and slow.

After much travel
Shiva met at his door
a stranger,
lopped off his head,
found it was his son.

Distraught he lopped
an elephant's head,
stuck it on
the severed neck:
Ganesh, Hindu god.

In temple shade
an acolyte burns
votary flame

for silver Ganesh.
He gives me ash

to dab my skin.
A kindly elephant
accepts my coin;
his trunk touches my head
in blessing.

When I feed him
small plantain bananas
his master is displeased.
These Hindu myths
I hardly understand.

Millions worship Ganesh.
We pay fifty paise,
a tourist thrill.
No real blessing
comes this way.

The elephant hobbles forward,
ash on his brow,
his hind legs
chained, iron-banded,
his eyes sad.

Like all true gods
he suffers with us,
shares our pain.
I feel at one,
even blessing.

Outside in the glare
beautiful women,
saris gold and crimson,
walk dusty streets
like elephants.

The Bard at Madurai

From socks to shirt
drenched in sweat
I gasp in dead, close air.
My lectures a veneer
I count the hours
until my hotel garden,
cold kingfisher beer.

But who's this old man
(unexpected curse)
bobbing about in white dhoti
among pink bougainvillea?
Three hours on a bus
ascetic hands grasp
my present, his epic verse.

I prepare for tact.
My eyes glance across
each stiff Miltonic line.
Shiva's servant must choose
a faithless boy who'll live
one hundred years, or
a devout son for nine.

He takes the holy child.
To my surprise
the tale grips me:
a simple temple setting,
jugs of milk on marble floors,
forest girls adorned with marigolds,
slippery, tapering thighs.

On the ninth birthday
comes Yama, God of Death,
neck garlanded with snakes,

flesh smeared with coal.
His black noose creeps
down the boy's throat,
jerks at his soul.

After the happy ending
(a Shiva year is magic,
equal to a million)
I surface to a childlike smile.
The old man fits his tale,
a naive faith,
the antique style.

Or so it seems.
In his tattered notebook
he wants my eulogy.
Somehow I like him better
now I see his guile.
For a private printing
I dash off fitting words.

He departs through twilight,
shades of bougainvillea
and squabbling mynah birds.

ALFRED CORN

From *Notes from a Child of Paradise**

XI

But, first, earlier matters want to be
Brought forward—and preferably on board
The Experiment, where the “Volunteers
Of the Discovery of the West” make
Their struggled-for knots up the Missouri
Beyond St. Louis. William Clark, who termed
The expedition “an undertaking
Of difficult and parlous nature,” turns
To his co-captain, his friend (I see him
Standing quietly near the tiller), and asks,

What final outcome can be expected?
No answer from the olive-gray waters
Where huge driftwood tree-stumps thrust up
bleached roots
That claw and find no purchase in silent
Air, futurity but the lightest breeze
That blows from the low green shore. Kentucky
And Virginia will have sent out their sons
To write this new chapter in a story
Long since venerable, the exploration
Of fields lying farther to the golden

* Four excerpts from a long poem of 100 such sections, to be published later this year. There are two narrative strands, one autobiographical, and the other historical, which treats the 1804–1806 expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore (at Jefferson’s directive) the Louisiana Purchase—if possible, to find the Northwest Passage. The poems here are reflections on the historical theme of American exploration and the encounter with a non-European Nature.

During the voyage, a French trapper named Chaboneau was engaged as a guide. His wife, a Shoshone named Sacajawea who had been abducted from her tribe at a young age, was able to assist as guide and interpreter once the expedition reached lands west of the Rockies. Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia* was an account of the evangelical triumphs of Puritanism in the Bay Colony. The French citation in XXIII is from Rimbaud’s *Bateau ivre*: “Yelling Red-skins had taken them as targets.”

West, the abstract place, notions for which all
 The half-formed Elysian mythscapes dreamed
 In Europe's longing for Arcadia
 Supplied—so much at odds with the extremes
 Of climate, rough profusion of nature,
 And resistance to invasion from those
 Who since prehistory had wrested bare
 Livelihoods from inhospitable lands,
 The rocks, the trees, the tangled green syntax
 Of the North American wilderness.

XIII

*The Cenozoic continent, roughwork
 Of earthquake and volcanic fire, relic
 Of the long glacial night, an enemy
 To civil settlement, keeps to its place
 In alien majesty above the towns.
 Habitation and tillage have never
 Sunk deep enough into the land; forests
 Echoing the patient blows of axes
 Send out a wide emptiness on the edge
 Of the faint cicada trill as night falls.*

*You gazing at the hillside brook will breathe
 In its white ruffles the fragrance of lost
 February snows, mountains men seldom
 Visit, if at all. And leave where they are
 Trillium and ladyslipper, that languish
 In gardens, happiest far from people's
 Tending: the dark whispers, Do not stay.
 Turning back to houses is renewing
 The will to construct a human dwelling,
 Yourself inasmuch as not of nature. . . .*

*All savage creatures must then be redeemed;
 And fought down the black swell, the echoed void.
 The voice crying out in the wilderness
 Is a civil war, for deep within lies
 A darker wilderness, fear of nature,*

*Sacrifice of self, where the wound bleeds word.
 Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,
 Wring a psalm from the forestries of Hell,
 A knot garden of Miltonic baroque—
 MAGNALIA on the Vine of the Lord.*

XXIII

*Des Peaux-Rouges criards les avaient pris
 Pour cibles. . . . Amerindians, their stock
 Proliferating from the Bering Strait
 To Tierra del Fuego; interpreted
 As every man the colonizers thought
 To find in Nature's Paradise or Hell.
 Among disruptive agents, consider
 The plague of ill-fitting mythography;
 And the brackish mouthful of fraud tasted
 By those who took baptism at its word.*

*Doña Marina and Pocahontas—
 If they'd known where collaboration led. . . .
 And you, Sacajawea, Shoshone,
 An island soul uprooted from your tribe,
 Lacking a context with Sioux and Mandan,
 Wife to a trapper, his eyes in your child's—
 The expedition must have seemed a wind
 That force and drift of chance had meant to raise—
 Force that flickering lesson learned by firelight,
 Fumes, seared meat, coals. . . . And resignation.*

*I like to see you in a younger guise,
 The face less like an eagle's, nor the gaze
 Sibylline, a sculptural armature
 Of bone upholding at cheek and forehead
 The unfathomable fable it half
 Wanted to tell. Before blunt happenstance
 Had come to lock in place your figurehead
 At the sharp prow of *The Experiment*,
 Breasting river waters, patient, splintered,
 Your eyes forever open, bright with fear.*

XXIX

Forced immobility in the winter
 Quarters at what the captains settled on
 Naming Fort Mandan made for a species
 Of leisure—to reflect, compose misspelled
 Diaries; and provision the larder
 With antelope and buffalo, butchered
 Into veal and steaks and stored under the stars
 In North Dakota's minus-thirty deep
 Freeze. . . . Or, that dark November, when they
 massed
 At the zenith, to watch the Northern Lights.

Invincible indifference, midnight
 As miracle: electron phalanxes
 Downswept from the Arctic as Polaris
 Summoned aloft flaring solstice searchlights
 In diamond blue, in irised green and red—
 Palisades, loom stretched with flame, a fireharp
 Baldaquino wrung into icicle
 Canticle by sharp solar wind, facets
 And panoptic discords forelightening
 Apocalypse's sky-wide burning glass.

Uncanny display, majestically cold,
 Out of reach to the tiny spectators'
 Frostbite and fevers, steady threat of death—
 Will it hold up as a balanced figure
 For universal law? Alien; vast;
 So immovable responses are just
 To howl as long as the bellows will pump,
 Or bow before the unknowable dark. . . .
 Dark as why, with knowledge of what they lose,
 Men choose their own wills, their own wars and
 wounds.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

At the Trade Center

Paused at the more than Brocken summit,
Hand outstretched to touch and cover
The falling height beneath, I watch
Between the nakedness of fingers—light
On each knuckled promontory of flesh
And shadows tremulous between the gaps—
The map of land, the map of air:
Rivers both sides of this island
Tug the gaze askance from the grid of streets
To the sea- and bird-ways, the expanse
That drinks the reverberation of these energies.
What can a hand bring back into a view
No rule of thumb made possible? It spans
The given rigours and the generous remissions
Of ocean, of the ferryings to-and-fro
Between the harbour and the islands. As you climb
The more you see of waters and of marsh
Where, angle-poised, the heron
Stands within earshot of this city
Back to the horizon, studying its pool.
The horizon is where we are:
The Bridge is small from this new vantage,
The view in space become a view in time:
Climbing we see an older city's fall—
The waterfront is down: the clerks are hived
Window on window where the town began
And spread. I spread my fingers
And the traffic runs between. The elevator grounds
Us back to streets where in the cracks
Between immeasurable buildings beggars
From their domains of dust and paper-bags
Hold out one hand deep in the traffic sounds.

In Verdi Square

A minute garden
you must not enter
and whose birds (there are notices)
you are forbidden to feed:

Verdi surveys it all
stone cloak on arm
as if about to quit
his pigeoned pedestal:

without coming down
he knows perfectly well
what operas are in town:
at the Ansonia Hotel

across the square
they have been practising
ever since Destinn and Caruso
and do so now:

ranged at his feet, stands
Falstaff beside
Aida and Leonora
watching a cast of thousands

pour into 72nd Street
as various as if the entire
complement of the complete
thirty operas were on stage at once

and crowding towards the green
silhouette of the Park
Olmsted had foreseen
against their advent, in '56—

the year *La Traviata*
arrived amid the brownstones and
the vista on unfinished vista
of a half-empty island.

All Afternoon

All afternoon the shadows have been building
 A city of their own within the streets,
 Carefully correcting the perspectives
 With dark diagonals, and paring back
 Sidewalks into catwalks, strips of bright
 Companionways, as if it were a ship
 This counter-city. But the leaning, black
 Enjambements like ladders for assault
 Scale the facades and tie them to the earth,
 Confounding fire-escapes already meshed
 In slatted ambiguities. You touch
 The sliding shapes to find which place is which
 And grime a finger with the ash of time
 That blows through both, the shadow in the shade
 And in the light, that scours each thoroughfare
 To pit the walls, rise out of yard and stairwell
 And tarnish the Chrysler's Aztec pinnacle.

Byzantium

In that "corridor of garments"
 Orchard Street the cry
 of a gigantic nightingale or thrush
 drops out of the sky.

Out of the sky?
 Out of the water-whistle
 of a vendor of plastic birds—
 and with so much of pastoral artifice

that the Sundaying Jews
 in their cars on
 Delancey Street might be
 tourists along the Vale of Hebron.

I choose a bird all green
for the colour that is not here
to testify to the birds of Gloucestershire
where it is I have been.

For, once I have gone
back, such a roulade
and cataract will never come
to the ear as on the sidewalks of Byzantium.

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

In the Last Days

Cedars cling,
roots dangling
like disconnected wires
dry in autumn wind
above layers of seabed sediment.
Edges sharper
than ancient ice
fall off below them.
Heavy with green
aquamarine berries
they have woven in
a century
holding decades against
freeze and thaw.
Here, near the water's
deepcut call,
on the side towards
the setting sun
they help me to hold
against the days to come.

SUSAN KENNEY

A Place I've Never Been

My father's hands are small and fine, but not a woman's hands. The nails are bitten short and ragged so that the skin at the tips of his fingers bulges over. The backs are freckled, tan, the palms and inside of the fingers rough and calloused, grit embedded in the patterns of whorls and lines. My father is a land manager for a big oil company, but he likes to make things, and when he is home from all the traveling he does, he spends a lot of time in the basement workshop, working on his latest projects. Last summer he built us a two car garage from the ground up; now he is finishing the attic. He has turned part of the basement into a spare room for my grandmother when she visits. In another space next to his workbench is the unfinished layout for his electric train, and tucked around behind the furnace next to the washing machine is the theater he made for my marionettes. There is sawdust on the floor in little pyramid piles where it has fallen from the sawblade, except where it has been kicked aside and spread thin. The workbench is not messy; there is a place for everything, even if everything is not always in its place.

As long as my father is home working there, the tools are everywhere. Sometimes when he is on the road my mother sneaks down and puts everything back, sweeps up the sawdust, or I do, because it reminds me of him when he's away, the smell of sawdust, the oil in the chassis of the small engine lying beside the curved tracks of the HO gauge leading nowhere on its base of plywood, the prickly odor of horse glue and rubber cement, metallic flavor of new nails. My father hardly ever works from a pattern or a plan; he'd rather make things up as he goes along. We ordered plans for the puppet theater, but he and my mother have altered them to suit, making it collapsible so it fits in the back of my mother's car in case I ever want to take my puppets on the road.

After my swimming lesson at the Y I meet him at the of-

fice he uses when he works in town and we walk up the street to where he parks the car. At the corner we stop at the tobacco store where my father buys his cigarettes. He stands in front of the cigar counter with one hand in his pocket, jingling the change that makes his right-hand pocket a bulky lump. I stand beside him, pressing my forehead and hands against the pale blue neon strip along the edge of the counter, hearing the hum of the light, feeling a mild vibration through my skin. The man behind the counter bends down, changing to a gargoyle figure through the layers of glass as I watch him rummage around. When he stands up he is holding a stack of empty cigar boxes.

"Take as many as you want, Jim, they're free."

My father taps several of the boxes with the dime he is holding; they sound hollow, hard, wooden. He inclines his head toward me, "They're for my daughter here," he says, and winks at me. "Thanks, Art. Put it on my bill."

My father gathers up the cigar boxes, distributes them under each arm, and hands me the carton of Camels to carry. He leaves the store, walking swiftly, his hands shoved deep in his pockets, the cigar boxes clamped under his arms on either side, his coattails ruffled up and flapping behind him like the tail of some huge bird. I run after him, trying to catch up, wondering what I am going to do with six empty cigar boxes, but when we finally reach the car, I am too out of breath to ask.

I watch as my father goes to work in the basement workshop. I must be quiet at these times, not ask too many questions, not distract him as he tries to work things out. His face is pursed in concentration as though he were about to blow a flute, and the two parallel furrows in his forehead I call his railroad tracks deepen as he squints and frowns at the pile of cigar boxes. Finally I can't stand it any more.

"What are you going to make, Daddy?"

But he only grunts and mutters something I can't quite hear. It may be "I don't know yet," or "You'll see," or "Don't ask." So often my curiosity gets the better of my patience, even though I have learned in these years of sitting beside him on my high stool, waiting and watching, not to

ask. My father is a lover of surprises, of mysteries and jokes and riddles, problems and complications that always seem to work out at the last moment. His favorite movies are thrillers, and he reads whodunits at night when he's at home. No matter what I ask him, he always knows the answer, knows how everything works and how to fix it, but he doesn't like to be asked what he is doing while he is doing it. Now he frowns silently, not in anger but in concentration, while I sit and watch and wait and see.

His hands move over the thin wood of the cigar boxes. He has scraped the labels off with a razor blade, and the curled-up pieces of paper lie in the little dunes of sawdust at his feet. Now he is drawing lines on the wood pieces, using a small ruler. When he puts the pencil down, the pieces of wood look like so many uncut puzzles.

"What are you two up to down there?" my mother calls from upstairs. I look up, startled, hoping she won't come down and interrupt us.

"Nothing much," my father calls. "Just a little something for Sara."

"Lunch in half an hour," my mother calls back. "Don't forget."

Nodding his head, even though my mother can't see us, my father takes down a fine-toothed saw and begins to cut the puzzle pieces. It takes a while; the wood is brittle, the pieces narrow in places. But he is careful, and I am quiet. I sit with my back to the huge furnace, feeling fidgety, watching him as he lays down the cut-out pieces one by one as though he were setting up a game of solitaire. It makes no sense to me. After a while I lose interest, hop down and go wandering through the other parts of the basement, push the train along its track as far as it will go, wondering when my father will get back to that. I have promised him I will put together the cardboard house models and stick up the little trees, but somehow we don't get around to it, what with one thing and another, golf on sunny days, a movie on rainy ones, me going to bed early during the week. There is the sound of light tapping from the workbench, but I'm not really paying attention, as I run my finger along the scrappy edges of the plywood country the train will run through one

of these days, wondering if it resembles any of the places my father travels to.

"It's done," my father says.

I turn around. My father is holding a small chair no higher than eight inches with a back like a ladder and a solid seat, legs that curve down gracefully like our big dining room chairs upstairs. I stare open-mouthed; it is magic, a conjurer's trick, all those pieces dealt out flat like a deck of cards and now transformed into this. I don't know what to say.

"I'm going to make you another chair and a table to go with it," my father says. He holds it up, studies it, turning it in his hands, then gives it to me. "Careful," he says. "I don't think it's very strong. But now your puppets will have someplace to sit." He smiles at me. "Okay, kid," he says, "I guess it's time to eat."

So together we go up the stairs, me holding the chair carefully in both hands, careful not to crush it, my father with one hand resting lightly on my shoulder, the other jammed in his pocket, laughing and talking, as though this time will go on forever, and nothing ever has to change.

After school lets out in June I go with my father to the doctor. It's nothing serious; after all, he is a young man, barely forty. Just now and then on the golf course, he tells the doctor, at the top of his swing, a pull, a tightness resisting, or at the top of a ladder reaching up to paint the eaves, a catch in the breath, a slight pain, a little dizziness, a time or two on the stairs walking up to his office, with me beside him, stopping, out of breath. Always before it has gone away, leaving him only momentarily ashen and trembling. I've gone with him because I need a physical for camp. He stays in the room watching while the doctor examines me, and I am embarrassed as I take off my shirt because my nipples are beginning to develop, little marshmallow puffs on my flat chest, so I hunch over to hide them. "Sit up straight," he says sternly, and I do.

The doctor listens to my chest and feels my belly and looks in my ears and up my nose and down my throat and pronounces me fit for camp. Then it is my father's turn. "You wait in the waiting room," my father says to me.

"Why can't I stay?" I ask. "I want to stay and watch."

My father shakes his head but he is smiling and I persist.

"You watched me," I say, my voice rising. "It's not fair. I want to see."

"See you later," my father says firmly. He shrugs out of his suspenders and starts to unbutton his shirt.

"If you'll excuse us," the doctor says, taking my arm.

"It's not fair, I want to see," I protest, even as I'm being escorted to the door. I look back over my shoulder at my father, who is sitting up on the examining table, shirt off, his suspenders drooping down around his hips. "Go on," he says. "You're not missing anything."

I stand outside the closed door for a moment, hearing them chuckling together. What is the secret, I wonder as I walk into the waiting room and sit down next to the fish tank, feeling cross. What are they trying to hide? But when my father comes out he is smiling. "Indigestion," he tells me. "You're fine too. Let's go." The doctor watches us from the doorway, round bland smiling face and blank glasses. Everything is fine.

The little kids are screaming and squealing, leaping around his feet at the bottom of the stairs, begging for one more piggyback ride upstairs. He shakes his head, but finally gives in, hoists first my sister Francie then my brother Vic up on either hip. Their feet dangle down around his legs; they are getting big. Their hands clutch at his coat, his neck, his hair, whatever they can grab onto for safety. He lurches slightly, pretends he's going to drop them; they shriek with terror. He starts up the stairs with them, groaning, "You guys are much too big for this." When he comes back down his face is sweaty, and he looks pale. I stand by the front door with the big glass panel in it, hand him his overnight bag. Upstairs the kids call out "Bye, Daddy!" "Bye!" he calls to them. "Bye, hon," he calls to my mother in the kitchen. "See you late tomorrow." He bends to kiss me. "See you later, Sari. You take care of everybody now." Then he hoists his new suitcase, goes out the door and down the steps. I don't watch him out of sight because I have things to do, and besides, he'll be back tomorrow night.

The sound of the phone ringing in my parents' bedroom wakes me up. It is just barely light; I look at the clock beside my bed. It is not the first time I have awakened this morning; I recall waking up and looking at the clock at four-twenty, then turning over and going back to sleep. It is now five A.M., and the phone is ringing. Something terrible has happened. Suddenly afraid, even panicky, I jump out of bed and run to the doorway of my parents' room next door. My mother is sitting on the end of the bed in her nightgown, clutching the receiver to her ear. She is staring out the window at the gray light.

"Four-twenty? Yes, yes, I see. No, not at all. I appreciate your calling." There is a long silence as she listens. I can't see her face, and I can't hear what the other person is saying, but I feel sick, because I know something has happened to my father, off on one of his trips. I lean against the doorjamb, and it creaks. My mother slowly turns to look at me. Her eyes are hollow-looking, her face slack and fallen.

"Daddy?"

My mother nods in slow motion. "Half an hour ago. Actually forty minutes," she corrects herself, looking at the clock. Her voice is as expressionless as her face. She blinks and jumps slightly as the phone jabbers in her ear. "What? Oh yes, of course. Someone will come right away. As soon as possible." She pauses, listening, then says politely: "Thank you very much for calling." She replaces the phone carefully, turns her face back toward the window, folds her hands on her knees and sits silently on the end of the bed, as if waiting for something. I remember my father sitting there on a day not long ago when the neighbors were having a big tree cut down two yards over. It was the tallest tree in the neighborhood, but we had one that was almost as tall and I was glad the tree was being cut down, so we would have the tallest. I said that to my father, and as he turned toward me, I was surprised to see the tears rolling down his face. I remember that now, watching my mother, thinking that only God can make a tree, and shouldn't somebody be crying about this? I shut my eyes, trying to picture my father's face and hear his voice, but already they are shadows, pale reflections in the window glass. I begin to

sob and choke, one hand over my eyes, the other holding my stomach.

My mother is beside me, her hands on my shoulders, shaking me. "Sara, Sara, listen to me. You mustn't cry now. You'll wake the children. Please, Sara, stop now."

I try to stop, but this only makes me cry harder. I put both hands up over my face.

"Sara," my mother whispers tensely, "if you're going to have to cry, you can go next door. I'll call Mrs. Smith and you can go there. I don't want you to wake your sister and brother. I have to think. I must think what to do." She peers into my face, gripping my shoulders hard. "Do you want to go next door?"

I wipe my face with the sleeve of my pajama top. "No, I want to stay here. I'll stop, I promise." I snuffle and hiccup, but I am no longer crying.

"Go back to bed and try to rest while I think what to do. It's so early. We mustn't wake the children; let them sleep. They'll know soon enough." She turns away, so calm.

I point to the other bed, my father's bed. "Can I stay with you?"

She sighs. "Of course." She reaches down, pulls back the covers. "Get in." She covers me up and tucks me in, then climbs back into her own bed, lies on her back staring at the ceiling, her arms back over her head. She is thinking. I turn away and bury my face in the pillow, afraid I may start to cry again, start and never be able to stop. After a while I fall asleep again, and it is as though it never happened, or is happening all over again when I wake up, now, then, and always.

The rest of the day is confused. I hardly see my mother. Neighbors come and go, bringing food and taking away dirty laundry without a word, or with soft murmurings I can't quite make out. Someone picks up my little sister and brother, taking them away to play, brings back clean laundry. My mother spends most of her time on the phone. I hear the words over and over again while I am down in the basement playing with my puppets. "Jimmy died." The words sound strange to me; I had thought death was some-

thing you were, not something you did. After lunch my best friend and her mother come to take me for a swim at their country club pool. Nancy and I stay at the pool while her mother goes off to play golf. It's crowded and the water is cold, but I get used to it, after a while don't even notice how cold it seemed at first. I keep forgetting what is special about today, about me. But every once in a while a feeling of detachment comes over me, as if I were someone else watching me, and then it dawns on me, "Oh yes, Daddy died." The first few times this happens the realization gives me a cold feeling in the pit of my stomach, but after a while the words don't shock me any more; it's as though I'm thinking about somebody else. Only once, as I'm swimming along underwater, holding my breath as long as I can, all of a sudden I stop. I hang suspended under the surface, floating quietly with my eyes closed. The water doesn't feel cold; I have gotten used to it and it is as though there is no water, no sensation, no noise except a slight hissing all around. I hang there relaxed, not breathing, and I wonder if this is what it feels like to be dead. If it is, it's not so bad; I'm still me inside, in spite of the silence. Then I run out of breath, shake myself to the surface with a whoosh, and go right on laughing and talking and swimming. I am just the same; nothing has really changed.

It's not until we're driving home afterward that the thought occurs to me there may be some mistake. My father and I have always been so close—I have always spent more time with him than anyone else; my sister and brother are too little, and my mother is always busy with them—if he were really dead I would know somehow, and feel different instead of just the same. By the time Nancy's mother drops me off at the house that afternoon, I am positive it isn't true. He can't have let this happen; I can't believe I'll never see him again. There has to be some mistake.

My grandmother and my mother's cousin Ralph have arrived from Skaneateles and are sitting on the porch with glasses of iced tea when I come up the steps. "Oh my darling," my grandmother says, but I shake off her hand and go on up to my room. In a little while my mother comes up to tell me that she and Cousin Ralph are leaving the next

morning for Canada to "bring Daddy home." I don't say anything, but I am sure that once they get to the hospital, they will discover the mistake. It's not my father who has died, but some other man who looks a lot like him. They will get there and see immediately that this is the wrong person; knowing him well, they will see this. Between them they will straighten everything out and my father will come home, possibly sick, otherwise he wouldn't be in the hospital in the first place, but still alive. I consider asking them if I can go too, but it's clear that my mother wants me to stay here and help Grammy with the children. So after they have left, I sit alone on the steps of our front porch, going over and over the whole problem in my mind. Inside the house my little sister and brother race around as though nothing has happened; I'm not even sure they've been told. My grandmother fusses and bustles through the house, gets dinner for the four of us, and we wait.

I am sitting on the steps when they come back that night.

"Hi, Sara," my mother says in a faint voice. "What are you doing up so late?" She seems weary; otherwise there is no change, no relief. I wait for her to say something.

"We brought him home, honey. He's at Uncle Frank's."

I stare at her in disbelief. Uncle Frank is not really my uncle; he and his family live next door. My first thought is that my father has been terribly disfigured and they don't want to shock us. He is waiting next door swathed in bandages, and we will go see him one by one, quietly so as not to disturb him. All of us together would be too much. Still, he will get better, and we can be together again. But then it occurs to me that she doesn't mean next door at all. The Coyles are undertakers; it's the family business. What my mother means is that they have dropped him off at the Coyles' funeral parlor downtown. I stare at the two of them in consternation. They have not discovered the mistake. I'm the only one who can tell it's not my father. I should have gone with them, but it's too late now. I stand up.

"I want to see him."

My mother and Cousin Ralph stare up at me. My mother sighs. My grandmother has come out of the house and stands next to me. My mother looks at her, and my grand-

mother purses her lips and shakes her head. "Not a good idea, Martha."

"No, Sara," my mother says wearily. "I want you to remember him as he was."

"I want to see him," I repeat. I don't know what's going on, and the only way I'm going to find out is to see whoever has been mistaken for my father.

"I don't want you to be upset," my mother says in the same weary tone.

"I promise I won't cry," I say quickly. My mother shakes her head, moves past me, Cousin Ralph holding her arm.

I follow them into the house and up the stairs, pleading, demanding, begging. I am twelve years old; I know what I am doing. They must let me see. Finally I wear them down, and they agree that I can go to the funeral home to view the so-called body before calling hours the next day. I'm so relieved; I'll know soon just by looking that it's not my father. I will calmly announce: "That's not him, you know." What happens after that I'm not sure. Since he hasn't come home when he said he would, then he must have lost his memory and be wandering somewhere, not knowing who he's supposed to be, and we'll just have to go looking for him. But first I have to see.

The next morning I get dressed in a spotted shirtwaist, my best dress, the first one I've had on since school let out three weeks ago, and stockings and shoes with heels. I have to make sure my seams are straight, so I hold up my mother's hand mirror over my shoulder and look at my reflection in the full-length mirror in the upstairs hall. But something goes wrong with the angle, and for a moment I can't see myself, only what looks like a hole in the mirror, or a tunnel into it. My stomach goes all cold and splintery as I look down the endless tunnel. *Why, that's eternity*, I think to myself as I stand there, *that's death*.

Horried, I stare at it for a moment, but then I remember the time not too long ago when my father took me to the side show and we saw a girl with no arms or legs, or so it seemed, because when I asked my father afterwards he told me it was all done with mirrors. I have been puzzling over this off and on ever since, but looking in the mirror now

and seeing myself reflected away, I have an idea of how it might work. Maybe that's it, I think to myself, maybe that's how he fooled my mother and the rest of them. Maybe it's not somebody else after all, but my father playing a joke, showing me how it's done. That's why it has to be me. I can hardly contain myself at this idea, and I'm too excited to eat much breakfast. It can be done, I think, and I'll know how when I get there.

I walk into the funeral parlor with my mother and Cousin Ralph, through a maze of little rooms and corridors, one after another, silently. Music is playing so softly I can't make out the tune, but it seems to come from everywhere. There is no other sound, not even our footsteps on the carpet. No windows, just closed doors and corridors opening out of rooms and soft light, soft music, a faint hissing that reminds me of the swimming pool.

"Where is he?" I say and jump at the loudness of my own voice; everything is so muffled. Cousin Ralph points to an open door at the end of the hallway, then takes my arm. I shake my head. "I want to go by myself." He looks at my mother. "I want to go by myself," I repeat. My mother nods; she and Cousin Ralph cross silently into another room where there are some chairs. I walk to the end of the hall and push open the door.

There are flowers all around, and the smell is so heavy it surrounds me and seems to press me down. I'm feeling a little short of breath because it's as hot as a greenhouse in here. I look around and see a door. I walk over to it and push it open slightly to let some air in and some of the sickening flower smell out. Outside the air is bright and dry; I can see dust specks sparkling in the air, my vision is so clear. But over the rooftops of the buildings across the street the sky is the color of an old tin bucket; it looks as though it might storm. Close by the door a stunted tree is growing up through a dusty round hole in the sidewalk. Its leaves twitch randomly. I take a deep breath of the outside air, then turn around and walk back to look at the flower arrangements, thinking there might be mirrors hidden in them someplace. I bend my head and read the cards, fol-

lowing the semicircle of flowers around. There are flowers from friends, from relatives, from my class at school, but no mirrors, at least none that I can find. But then I remember I haven't even looked to see whether it's really my father or not. I look in the direction of the casket. From this angle, seen out of the corner of my eye, it's no more than an oblong shape on a raised platform, the lid propped up like a grand piano. I walk over and look straight at it.

The body certainly bears a strong resemblance to my father; I can see how someone might have made a mistake. A quilted satin blanket covers the legs and torso, but I can see that the body is dressed in my father's favorite suit, navy blue pinstripe, wearing his favorite tartan tie and blue shirt. Blue is his favorite color. Well, never mind, they can have the suit and tie; how were they to know it's all a trick?

I look more closely. The face is smiling, the eyes shut, very peaceful looking. I don't feel the least bit upset; after all, this is our little joke, our secret. It's up to me to solve the puzzle. So I take inventory, starting at the top.

The hair is about the color of my father's, maybe a little grayer, wavy, but combed down flatter than he would have done. Two parallel lines not unlike the ones that crease my father's forehead—what we call his railroad tracks—are just barely visible; in fact all of the skin is smoother than my father's, paler in some places, rosier in others. All the other lines are gone. Why, he looks like he's been ironed, I think to myself, and have to cover my mouth to keep from laughing. Then I see there is a slight indentation across the bridge of the nose just where the garage door fell down on my father, smacking him right across the face, so he had a broken nose and two black eyes.

I stand back and fold my arms. The face is not unlike my father's, but I have never seen him so still, not even in sleep, so flattened out and smoothed. What bothers me the most is the mouth; the lips look fake, too broad, false-looking, added on like the pink wax lips my friends and I sometimes buy for a joke at the dime store. I sigh and tap my foot, shift my weight in the unfamiliar high heels, look around the room wondering what to do next. Then out of the corner of my eye I see the chest rise and fall.

I move to the head of the casket and look back, staring at the chest. As I watch, it seems to move up and down, slowly but regularly. That's it then, I think, catching my breath and grinning to myself. He's alive. It is my father, creased nose, railroad tracks, pinstripe suit and all, and he's alive. He was just pretending. No mistaken identity, no mirrors. All I have to do is let him know I know, and the joke will be over. I open my mouth to say his name, tell him I'm here and he can get up now. Meanwhile, my eyes are glued to the chest as it moves up and down ever so slightly.

"Daddy?" I say. He doesn't move, make any sign he's heard. Maybe he's gone to sleep, after waiting all this time? I reach out my hand to lay it on his chest.

And stop with my own hand held out, suspended over his chest, staring at his hands.

They are folded just below his chest, where the satin quilt stops. The fingers are loosely, even casually interlaced, as though, reclining on a sofa, perhaps just waking up from a nap, he might be about to make some wry, slightly humorous remark prefaced by a wave. The backs are pale and almost transparent, flat and faintly lined, like wax paper someone has crumpled up and then tried to smooth out. The freckles stand out like flecks of paint. The nails are grayish white and very short, and though they are filed neatly straight across, not bitten ragged, the tips bulge over. The fingers are square at the tips; the hands are small and fine, but not a woman's hands. I would know them anywhere. These are my father's hands.

From where I stand, just at his shoulder, I can also see the backs of the fingers. They are oddly peaked, crumpled behind, puckered as though they've been left in water too long. I stare at the shriveled fingers. They are not alive. The chest they are folded across is absolutely still. I seem to be looking at a flat, pale, smooth reflection of my father. The mirrors, I say to myself, it's the mirrors after all, and I look around wildly, inside the top of the casket, the ceiling, over my shoulder. There are mirrors everywhere, nowhere. And then the mirror tunnel curls up over my head like a wave, and the room starts to revolve around me. I see a little figure disappearing down the tunnel and as I stand with my

hand held out over his chest, over his folded dead hands, I know I have to touch him, it's the only way to know for sure that it's a trick; I have to touch him. I stand there with my hand held out, wanting to touch him, but I don't; I can't.

And then I am outside, clutching the stringy little tree with both my hands, pressing my forehead hard into its rough and wrinkled bark. And I am crying, loudly, hysterically, harder than I ever thought possible, all the time looking straight down at the little circle in the sidewalk at the tree's base, watching my tears fall and make crater after crater in the dust.

And Cousin Ralph is tugging at me, first gently, then almost angrily, pulling at me, wrenching my hands away from the tree and shaking me, "Don't cry, Sara, it's all right, Sara, you mustn't cry like this. Sara. This isn't easy for any of us. Sara, you promised . . . you can't say we didn't warn you." He pulls me toward the door. I'm blinded by tears, but I resist. I won't go back. Cousin Ralph says in an exasperated voice, "Sara, I'm disappointed in you. What would your father say?"

"I don't care," I say between sobs. "I'm not going back in there."

We walk down the sidewalk along the outside of the funeral parlor. The walls are sandy brick, and seem to rise out of the sidewalk as if they had always been there. I turn the corner and walk over to the car, get in the back seat and wait while Cousin Ralph goes inside to find my mother. They don't look at me, just get into the front seat. No one talks. All the way home I stare out the side window, wondering how this could have happened. I have behaved badly, have failed everybody, especially my father. I should have been there, gone after him, kept him from disappearing down the mirror tunnel. At least I could have touched him one last time to say goodbye, to let him know that I was there. To let me know that he was there, that he was really there.

On the way home it rains. The next day I refuse to go to the funeral, choosing to stay home with the babysitter instead, even though I am almost old enough to babysit myself. I've let him down; I should have known better, done

better, at least been there when he died. But he's let me down too. He should have known better, if he was so smart, known enough to keep this from happening. I don't want to see him, not ever again; I'm haunted by the feeling that he's done this on purpose, left us for some obscure reason I'll never understand.

Later that summer when my mother wants to go back to the place where he died, to talk to his friends and the doctors, the hotel clerk, to find out all she can about his last moments, I refuse to go with her. Whatever his last moments were like, I don't want to know.

"It's better this way," my mother says in the flat characterless monotone of grief. She sits by the window, hands folded, in an attitude of acceptance, or is it resignation or despair? It is months, even years, before her voice loses this flatness, begins to assume the timbre of her violent mood swings, the racing speeded-up breathlessness of mania, the slowed-down growl of depression, so that years later I will remember her voice as a record playing always at the wrong speed, too fast or too slow. All this, her later breakdowns, will be perhaps the consequence of this death and other blows coming in quick succession, perhaps a weakness in her character itself, a flaw or crack into which tragedy seeps and freezes, expanding until it crumbles the façade. It is several years before I begin to hear the resentment, the blame, the stories of how he would not stop smoking, kept drinking too much, would not lose weight, wouldn't do the things the doctor told him that might have prolonged his life. He did not want to live that way. There is perhaps no other explanation. And it is many years more before she tells me that they knew all along he had a valve defect and could go any time, and that is what they lived with, this knowledge that he might die suddenly. She always expected it, that phone call in the night. She tells me these stories, and others at various times, but I try not to believe they are true, because I don't want to believe that he would choose to die in this irresponsible, uncaring fashion, that it is all his fault. It's no one's fault, not his, not mine. Still, it remains a mystery to me why there wasn't something someone could have done. If I had only been there, I find myself thinking at

odd moments, surely I would have been able to do something to help.

"He would have hated being an invalid," my mother says in that passive, reasoned tone that passes for acceptance, even though she will never accept, will rail against this for the rest of her life. "It's better this way."

And in my childish literal way, not knowing yet that it is what we all say when faced with an unacceptable occurrence that cannot be justified or altered, I wonder, "Better than what?"

After a summer of self-recriminations—how could I have talked so mean to him so often, refused to go with him to this place or that, smoked in the attic with my friend, not eaten all the green beans on my plate, turning that one rejected dinner into a showdown that lasted far into the night, all the little things he minded and chided me for: I could have been a better daughter if I'd known it was going to be so short—gradually my grief lessens. I stop thinking of myself as a special case requiring sympathy, about whom teachers talk in hushed tones in the hallways. In the fall, we suddenly pack up and move back to the place my mother grew up, to live with my widowed aunt and grandmother, leaving behind the house in Toledo with all his improvements, the garage he built, the unfinished train layout and who knows what else. The puppet stuff goes with me; in this one hobby I persist alone.

Years pass. I grow up, leave home. It seems I hardly miss him any more, seldom think of him, though once in a while, walking down the street of some strange city, the thought will cross my mind that I might meet him coming toward me. After the first shock of recognition I will walk up to him and say: "Where have you been all this time? What have you been doing with yourself?" in a conversational tone, because after all these years it would be pointless to accuse, and besides, I'm glad to see him. But after a while I stop talking to him in my mind, because the conversations get harder and harder to imagine. I get older and of course he stays the same, frozen forever in early middle age, his hair hardly gone gray. Only his hands I can imagine old, pale and withered up as parsnips. I marry and have children of

my own, try to imagine him a grandfather and can't. Neither can they, the boy and girl I sometimes in absentminded moments call by my little brother's and sister's names. They ask me about him sometimes, and I try to tell them, show them pictures, but it doesn't really help. I think sometimes about men I know who are his age, or the age he would be now, and try to match him up—he might have this one's silvery white wavy hair, that one's cheerful disposition, another one's crotchety businessman's political views. He cried when the tree was cut down, but did everything he could to get into the army in World War II, raged in frustration, my mother says, when they wouldn't take him. Would he have minded Vietnam? Would we have agreed about that? Would he have been excited by the idea of men on the moon and stayed up all night to see the first moon-walk? Would we have agreed, or fought and grown apart?

But these are idle speculations. Most of the time when I think of him at all it is with muted sorrow that he has not been here to see how I've grown up, married a good man, had these beautiful and clever children, a nice house, see how well I've done all these years without him. It would have been easier with him, but I try not to think about that. It's so long ago now, what's the point? Gone is gone, why search for fathers now? I've forgiven him for not being here, and I'm not even sure I'd want him to come back, even if he could. It's been so long; where would we begin?

That is what I say to myself, and I believe it. Yet for a long time after his death, I find myself looking for him in my dreams. Sometimes I see him walking toward me, hands always in his pockets, coat fanned out behind, smiling in sudden recognition, as if he didn't know he'd gone away and left me all these years. More often he's walking away, about to turn the corner, and I have to run after, because I'm the only one who knows him, knows who he used to be. Always in these dreams I find him, walking down the street of a place I've never been before, and we pick up exactly where we left off all those years ago.

But after a while even the dreams stop, and he becomes no more than a faded recollection, flattened and smoothed, a smiling, insubstantial reflection somewhere in the back of my memory. I remember almost nothing specific about him,

not his voice, his shape, the clothes he wore, the color of his hair. Only once, while I am watching my brother as he works away in a basement workshop he has made for himself, building furniture and making toys for his children, I see his hands and remember my father's hands making things for me and I remark how small, yes how very small and fine they are, improbably small for a man his size. I see my brother's hands and I think: Why yes, that is the way they were, my father's hands, that is how they really looked. And I think how odd, how could I forget? But I forget again. With so ethereal a memory I am safe from grief.

"Mom, Mom!" I hear my children crashing down the attic stairs this rainy day, excited by the latest treasure they've unearthed. "Look what we found in that box of old puppet junk! Whose is it? Can we have it?"

They stand there clutching it awkwardly between them, grabbing it back and forth with small grubby hands, looking up at me eagerly, neither one willing to let go. Where on earth has it come from after all these years? The other chair and table my father made me are long gone. I can remember the last time I saw them, before the children were born, in a production of a Handel puppet opera I did with friends in graduate school. I never bothered to get them back afterwards. Looking at David and Linnie now, jostling each other in excitement, yanking the chair between them, I am suddenly afraid they will wrench it apart, so I reach out and carefully disengage it from their hands.

"I'm sorry but you can't have it," I say. "It's mine."

They stare up at me, their mouths and hands gone slack, unable to believe this little toy chair is mine.

David, always the negotiator, recovers first. "Can't we even play with it? We'd be careful."

"Yeah," Linnie chimes in. "We'd be extra careful. Please?"

But I'm hardly listening to them as I dust it off, rub it a little, hold it in my hands, recalling the day my father made it for me out of a couple of old cigar boxes more than thirty years ago. It looks so fragile, but here it is, not lost, not even broken. And I find myself thinking of other things,

suits and overcoats and snap brim hats, the cigarette lighter that always fell out of his pocket when he bent over to pick me up, the fountain pen that leaked, the unfinished train layout, the tools, all long since sold, abandoned, left behind, lost or otherwise disposed of. I haven't even thought of it for years, still here it is, with that mindless arbitrary persistence of objects. How can it be that this frail little object still exists and he does not?

And as I stand here holding it, suddenly it feels brand-new, and I am standing next to him, bewildered, while his hands move over the bits of cigar box lid, conjuring this little chair. Small hands, fine but not a woman's hands, square at the tips, the skin bulging over, moving, always moving, never still. And holding the little chair so tight I almost crush it, afraid in this one instant to let go, I feel the chilling rush of time passing, leaving him behind, the frozen gap of years; I see that face gone deep in concentration, those shriveled hands so like my brother's hands, my children's hands, my own . . .

And the children are clamoring, reaching upward, leaping around his feet, and he shakes his head but finally gives in, hoists first one and then the other onto his hips like saddlebags, their starfish hands clutching at his coat his neck his hair whatever they can grab onto for safety as I stand there watching, too old for piggybacks myself, stand there watching as he struggles up the stairs, lurching and grunting, pauses on the landing to give me a rueful look, then continues on up. I hand him his suitcase, stand on tiptoe to kiss him goodbye. "See you when I get back," he says breathlessly as he throws his coat over his shoulder, goes out the door, down the steps, turns to wave goodbye once more, but his face is ashen, and his skin is slicked with sweat. It is the face of a dead man. *Oh God, I should have stopped him.* Come back! I call to him but it's too late; he's already disappeared down the tunnel full of mirrors. I should have stopped him, but how could I have known?

Daddy; I would have saved you if I could. And here I am still running after, trying to catch you in that place I've never been.

GERALD EARLY

"I Only Like It Better When the Pain Comes":¹ More Notes Toward a Cultural Definition of Prizefighting

To all the black boys of Philadelphia
who are the small princes of our wounded order

I. THE EXILES

On a summer day many years ago Jeff Chandler beat my cousin, Gino Fernandez, in a fight on the grounds of the Nebinger schoolyard. I think both Jeff and Gino were nine or ten which means that I was about fourteen or fifteen. I doubt if now it is remotely possible to recall the reason for the fight. I lived in South Philadelphia and my cousin, who lived in West Philadelphia, would from time to time come to visit me and spend a few days. I remember well how we enjoyed each other as boys, finding much to do with our days together. This was to change as Gino grew older; towards the end of his life I rarely saw him and when I did we had little enough to say. In recent years, I have come to feel quite badly about this estrangement even though it was not my fault that it occurred. On this particular day of the fight, I suppose that my cousin's being from West Philadelphia and therefore a stranger in the neighborhood may have had something to do with the antagonism between the boys. Jeff probably instigated the fight because he was always, as I remember him, a very tough small boy who took a great deal of pride in his ability to fight.

The battle was not a very long one. It started out evenly enough but the crowd of boys who nearly smothered the combatants were quite partisan in favor of Jeff, giving him

¹ The title comes from an article which appeared in the March 1983 issue of *The Ring Magazine* which was entitled "1982: The Year of the Notables and Quotables" (pp. 18–29). The full quotation of Frank (the Animal) Fletcher is on page 22 and it reads as follows: "I hate to say it, but it's true that I only like it better when pain comes."

the sort of “home court advantage” that revealed to me instantly that my cousin was doomed. Gino did, though, fight quite well for several minutes. Suddenly, Jeff hit him with an uppercut to the solar plexus so perfectly executed that any prizefighter would have been proud to have thrown it; its technique was not simply flawless, it was rich in artistic refulgence. My cousin crumpled to the ground in agony. He was crying, a sure sign of capitulation. Jeff walked away, surrounded by his cloud of admiring and cheering witnesses. He felt no sympathy for the loser and, in truth, it was proper that he did not. After all, each boy knew the risks of the encounter before it began, and to commit oneself to any action is to commit oneself to the etiquette of promptly paying certain immediate psychic costs for failure. So, after a minute or two of taunts and jeers directed at me about my “punk cousin,” I was left alone to tend to Gino, who was now sobbing heavily and deeply ashamed. I picked him up, extricated a balled-up, snotty handkerchief from my pocket, and wiped his face. We walked together almost in the pose of big brother and little brother: I held my arm around his shoulder and he walked with his head down. I told him not to cry, that everything would be all right, that he would surely have better days. I was quite wrong in this prediction, for if anyone was to have better days it was to be Jeff Chandler. My cousin, at the age of sixteen, was to have his head blown off by a sawed-off shotgun fired at close range by a sniper during a street gang war. Jeff Chandler is now the World Boxing Association bantamweight champion. The fates of these boys, poor black boys of the streets, far from being unique, take on a sort of dreary, deadening, clichéd familiarity. Both fought for street gangs as adolescents and either could have drawn the other’s fortune or misfortune. Chandler could very easily have ended up on a slab in the morgue, and my cousin might well have become a professional fighter. This is perhaps not only how the Bigger Thomases of black America are born, but also how they are made.

Although my cousin lived and died in West Philadelphia, his funeral took place in a South Philadelphia funeral home. The deep oddity of that fact is that the funeral came very

close to not taking place at all in that location. The South Philadelphia street gang nearest to the funeral home was the 5th and South Streets gang, the very gang that Jeff Chandler was then fighting for. And these boys were not going to have their turf invaded by the comrades-in-arms of a fallen West Philadelphia gang member. I remember that at the funeral there were nearly as many cops as bereaved relatives and friends, and such a guarded atmosphere that one might have thought some cruel political dictator was being buried. If there had not been so many police officers present, my cousin's funeral might very well have sparked more bloodshed.

I do not think any group of people could have felt more diminished and deranged by all this than my family did. Here, after all, was a young, wayward Jehovah's Witness boy who was murdered according to the arcane but deadly rules of the ghetto rites of passage. My family, both its South Philadelphia and West Philadelphia branches, had never thought it even lived in a ghetto, much less that it would be brutalized by its hard reality. My mother was stunned to learn that Gino was a member of a street gang. I was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania at the time and this whole horrible incident made me feel degraded.

Jeff Chandler is a very good professional fighter, amazingly good when one considers that he has had no amateur career to speak of. He had a few amateur fights, then decided that it would be better to fight for money and glory than for trophies and glory, especially since the amount of effort would be about the same. He has beaten everyone in his weight division worth beating, and would love to fight his Latin counterpart—Lupe Pintor, the World Boxing Council bantamweight champion—in a title unification bout. But the young Mexican wants nothing to do with Chandler, so the hard Philadelphian will probably move on to the featherweight division and hope that he can make more money fighting bigger fellows. Because of the death of Tyrone Everett, the retirement of Joe Frazier, the deterioration of Matthew Saad Muhammad and Jimmy Young, and the unfulfillment of Curtis Parker and Frank Fletcher, Chandler has become the top Philadelphia fighter. That is quite an accomplishment because that town produces many good fighters,

and the training sessions, both in the gym and on the streets, are wars of the bloodiest and most demanding kind. Chandler, simply put, is a survivor in a place and in an occupation where most are swallowed whole in mid-career.

II. THE KINGS IN THE TOWER

PART 1

Alexis Arguello, great champion of the featherweight, junior lightweight, and lightweight divisions, is known to be a friendly, easy-going fellow outside of the ring. He numbers among his friends many fighters who are potential rivals. He seems particularly proud of his friendship with Sugar Ray Leonard who despite his retirement is still a potential rival because everyone knows that retirement announcements in boxing do not mean much. The story goes that once in a social context Arguello met Roberto Duran, great champion of the lightweight and welterweight divisions, and came up to shake hands and chat with him. At this time Duran was still considered to be, by those who are supposed to know, pound-for-pound the best fighter in all of boxing, and there was more than a little talk of a possible big money bout between him and Arguello. Duran, known for his haughty disdain for and intense dislike of opponents, looked aghast at the approaching Arguello and, while backing away from him, screamed, "Get away from me! I'm not your friend! Get away from me!"

As crazy as it seems, Duran merely took one of boxing's learned inclinations to both its neurotic and its rational limits. It would seem only to complicate matters a great deal to be friendly with the men one is required to fight. A boxer must inflict a lot of punishment in the normal course of a fight in order to expect to win, and it would seem that he might feel less compromised or uneasy in his actions if the opponent was not a friend. On the other hand, it is quite natural for people who share a particular profession also to share friendships; who can know better than a prizefighter the rewards of achievement or the frustrations of defeat in the prizefighting profession?

Duran does not wish to be friendly with boxers who may be potential opponents because it makes the psychological part of training that much harder. This is often referred to as “psyching yourself up,” which means creating an artificial hatred for your opponent, so that you may more efficiently and brutally beat him up. There is more at work here than the incredibly fierce sense of Darwinian competition that characterizes the spirit of play in other professional sports. Boxing, after all, is the only sport whose object is to hurt your opponent—to place him in such pain, to inflict such severe injury upon him, that he cannot or will not continue to fight. The emotional incentive for this must be deeper than the mere quest for championship belts and big money, although, to be sure, those latter items do spur fighters on. Boxers must be driven by other needs as well when they enter the ring: they must have “something to prove,” or they must “hold a grudge” against their opponent for some imaginary or petty slight, or they must feel like particularly evil bastards who can, to use John L. Sullivan’s phrase, “lick any son of a bitch in the house.” In short, the bouts become quests for manhood.

Leonard Gardner’s fine novel about second-rate boxers in California, *Fat City*, contains a scene in which the reader sees the pathetic desperation of this psyching up of the boxer, this dredging up of courage from the spirit to stem the tide of the deep fear of it all:

“Hoping never done nothing,” [said Buford Wills.] “It *wanting* that do it. You got to want to win so bad you can taste it. If you want to win bad enough you win. They no way in hell this dude going beat me. He too old. I going be all over him. I going kick him so bad, everytime he take a bite of food tomorrow he going think of me. He be one sore son-of-a-bitch. He going *know* he been in a fight. I get him before he get me. I going hit him with everything. I won’t just *beat* that motherfucker, I going *kill* him.” Buford was small and thin. His hair, divided at one side with a razor-blade part, was cropped close. His nose turned up, his nostrils flared, his lips were soft and full and his hooded eyes were narrowed in a constant frown. The year before, only fourteen, he had lied about his age and won the Golden Gloves novice flyweight title in San Francisco. Tonight he was fighting the champion of Fort Ord. “You want to know what make a good fighter?”

"What's that?" [asked Ernie Munger.]
 "It believing in yourself. That the will to win. The rest condition. You want to kick ass, you kick ass."
 "I hope you're right."
 "You don't want to kick ass, you get your own ass whipped."
 "I want to kick ass. Don't worry about that."
 "You just shit out of luck."
 "I said I wanted to kick ass."
 "You got to want to kick ass *bad*. They no manager or trainer or pill can do it for you."
 "I want to kick ass as bad as you do."
 "Then you go out and kick ass."

I have spoken in an earlier essay² about the general cultural significance of prizefighting, but I would like to be a bit more specific here. One of the two interrelated cultural needs that boxing serves suggests that the antagonism of the opponents is very much like that of a morality play, a morality play about the very nature of capitalistic society. Despite the fact that boxing is an international sport, practiced everywhere on the globe, America has become and has been for some time the center of professional fighting. Most of the best fighters are Americans; most of the big money originates here, and most of the publicity as well. In short, boxing is an American pastime. Moreover, one must not lose sight of the fact that modern professional boxing in its traceable history was a product of Britain; boxing in its course to its present identity is not just Western, not simply American, but particularly Anglo-Saxon. It should come as a surprise to no one, knowing modern prizefighting's national and racial origins, that the sport extols most simply and directly the values that the Anglo-Saxon male has historically cherished most: the indomitable will of the individual, aggressive conquest, and contempt for humiliation and submission. It is, perhaps, intended to be the height of irony that Wills, the black boy, the historical victim of the Anglo-Saxon's will to power, should teach Ernie Munger, the white boy, the Western values of male conquest. Wills's little speech sounds as much like the street-corner version of the philosophy of Robinson Crusoe as it does like the advice of

² "Hot Spicks Versus Cool Spades: Three Notes Toward a Cultural Definition of Prizefighting," in *THE HUDSON REVIEW*, Volume XXXIV, Number 1 (Spring 1981).

a senior board room executive to a junior upstart. It is one of the striking ironies of the novel that boxing, a sport which so ruthlessly symbolizes the success ethic of American society, produces men who are so ill equipped to be anything but failures. Thus, one of the true oddities of the symbolism of boxing is that the minority male, in becoming like the paradigmatic, mythological Anglo-Saxon male, wears a kind of white face.

Duran's little episode with Alexis Arguello might remind one of the incredible invisible burden of the champion boxer, the great "asskicker." Gardner's novel is exclusively concerned with pugs or as Camus called them, "low-brow gods." But the intensity of emotional commitment is greater when the fights mean more; more money, more prestige for the winner, more humiliation for the loser. Duran's insecurity has its source in the very deep doubt he must have about his self-image in his chosen profession. Duran is afraid, not so much of being beaten, but of being reduced, lessened, by showing any signs that would make him less committed to his line of work. One must remember that it was Duran who once said after beating an opponent that if he had been in shape he would have sent him to the morgue, not the hospital; it was Duran who once saluted Sugar Ray Leonard's wife by pointing his middle finger and calling her "puta" (whore); and it was Duran who spat in Leonard's face at the end of their first bout. This need for the commitment, the overwhelming identification not with boxing but with what it means to be an asskicker, is probably the main reason that Duran is still fighting even though he should have retired a few years ago. Duran is more the mythical Anglo-Saxon male than the Anglo-Saxon himself, and if that identification proves meaningless, then Duran is forced to ask himself what his blustering quest for manhood means? This is why he is still fighting and embarrassing himself. He does not want to think about what it would mean to stop: then, he would be like a soldier without a war.

PART 2

A film which clearly presents, in a huge metaphorical gesture, the secret fear of the male is the 1950s science fiction

classic, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. Slowly, as the hero's body becomes smaller and smaller, the audience finds him overwhelmed not by life generally, not by his job, his government, his culture, or by his general intercourse with other people—but by his home and his wife. The woman becomes an overprotective giant and the home a wild hive of booby traps which threaten him at every turn. One is, of course, reminded of Leslie Fiedler and his talk about those many nineteenth-century American Adams who were trying to escape the very things that Herman Melville's Tommo was returning to at the end of *Typee*: home and mother. In *The Incredible Shrinking Man* there is a parodic inversion by which the man finds himself being swallowed by his home and his wife (whose relative largeness and maternal concern make her a mother figure); he must do battle against objects of his own home: a cat and a spider. The hero thus discovers that living in his home has become the ultimate pioneering adventure as he hunts for food and water and, in the final symbol of pathetic power, uses a straight pin for a sword. Grant Williams, who portrays the hero, ultimately loses his battle as his body simply vanishes by the end of the film.

This neurotic vision, or rather this dream or parable of the neurotic trapped male, poses a very essential question about the sport of boxing: what is its secret, primeval appeal to its viewers? Part of the answer, no doubt, lies in the boxer's puritanical regimen: the hard training, the abstinence from sex before a fight, the Spartan diet. The boxer's leanness and physical conditioning become a sign of his virtue, a virtue worth a great deal in a land where the fatness of sin is the sin of fatness. But more deeply, the answer rests somewhere in the fact that the male is not needed as a cultural image for his courage, stamina, and heart, all of those manly virtues about which he has woven myths; he is needed as a psychological emblem to illustrate the capacity of dumb suffering. It is the torment and disfigurement of the male body that helps the male to achieve the godhead. Norman Mailer would find in a film like *The Incredible Shrinking Man* the most endearing symbolism.

The first section of Mailer's *The Fight* opens and closes with images of the male body; the opening chapter describes "the Prince of Heaven," Muhammad Ali, in a train-

ing session, the beautiful body hiding both power and grace within its limbs:

To the degree that boxing is carnality, meat against meat, Ali was master when it was time to receive, he got the juice out of it, the aesthetic juice of the punches he blocked or clipped, plus all the libidinal juice of Bossman Jones banging away on his gut. . . .

Now it was as if Ali carried the idea to some advanced place where he could assimilate punches faster than other fighters, could literally transmit the shock through more parts of his body, or direct it to the best path, as if ideally he was working toward the ability to receive that five-punch combination (or six or seven!) yet be so ready to ship the impact out to each arm, each organ and each leg, that the punishment might be digested, and the mind remain clear. It was a study to watch Ali take punches.

The descriptions seem complementary. In the first, the body as mythic image lies between art and sex; and in the second, the body is the mechanism that must be controlled and manipulated by the mind. Both denote so precisely the precarious precision of the boxer's psychological tightrope-walk between seizing and creating the moment or squandering it. Mailer is indeed concerned with the wider symbol of the black male's tightrope-walking. But Mailer's representation is not so much a psychology of the male body as it is an anthropology of the male body. Somehow, through the imagery at the beginning of Ali's body as self-fulfilling sex, as art, and as machine, and the imagery at the end of the first section of the spindly, ugly body of Ali's talkative trainer, Drew Brown, the reader is presented with the history of male culture, from prince to clown, from the improvisations of the body to the improvisations of language (when the body, as in the case of Brown, fails as adequate symbolism). The polar realities of Brown and Ali as male figures symbolize the morality of masculinity: Ali puts his body on the line and is, thus, a hero-warrior. Drew Brown weaves with his mouth and is like a jester, a gnome, or as Mailer calls him, The King of the Flunkies. It is Brown who creates Ali's chants and poetry and it is with Brown that Mailer "plays the dozens." So, although Ali was known as "the Mouth," Mailer's fascination and that of the entire Western culture with

Ali has, in truth, always been with his heroic body. Boxing becomes, for Mailer, the most primitive yet the highest moment for the male psyche. The one-on-one encounter, the rewards of its brinksmanship, the egotistic excesses of its one-upmanship, is what boxing and the male body mean.

The major problem with Mailer's fight book is that he spends a good number of his pages, far too many really, writing about race. This comes about because this book, like most of Mailer's fight pieces, is about Muhammad Ali, and with Ali as a subject I suppose one is, perforce, confronted with the issue of race. Yet I think white writers like Mailer use Ali as an excuse to write about race, or more precisely, about blacks: what a wonderful opportunity to clear the chest and spleen of numerous phobias and neuroses! When Mailer writes about race or about blacks he invariably is going to sound like the writer who penned that inglorious essay, "The White Negro"—which means that he is liable to sound foolish. He will not sound utterly foolish, just foolish enough to make any knowing reader accept his good portions with a great deal of suspicion. Consider these passages:

But [Norman Mailer's] love affair with the Black soul, a sentimental orgy at its worst, had been given a drubbing through the seasons of Black Power. He no longer knew whether he loved Blacks or secretly disliked them, which had to be the dirtiest secret in his American life. Part of the woe of the first trip to Africa, part of that irrationally intense detestation of Mobutu . . . must be a cover for the rage he was feeling toward Blacks, any Blacks. . . .

. . . [H]is animosity switched a continent over to Black Americans with their arrogance, jive, ethnic put-down costumes, caterwauling soul, their thump-your-testicle organ sound and black new vomitous egos like the slag of all of alienated sewage-compacted heap U.S.A.; then he knew that he had not only come to report on a fight but to look a little more into his own outsized feelings of love and—could it be?—sheer hate for the existence of Blacks on earth.

Mailer was in Zaire to report on the heavyweight championship fight between Ali and George Foreman which took place in a hastily constructed stadium in the fall of 1974. Thus, the reader is confronted with Mailer's image of the land of bogeys and boots, the land without rational order;

and the image becomes a quest on Mailer's part for the legitimization of his own rational white mind and his confessed inability to understand that mind which symbolizes for him the non-white other. It is Mailer's being in Africa and covering a fight between two black fighters that ultimately leads to the sort of psychic flatulence that the two quotations reveal. For Mailer, the black is always the id-dominated beast, the heart of the white man's darkness; and always, in Mailer's tone, there is that juvenile penis envy that might as well be hate because it amounts to such an insulting kind of love. He writes elsewhere in the book:

So much resentment had developed for black style, black snobbery, black rhetoric, black pimps, superfly, and all the virtuoso handling of the ho. The pride Blacks took in their skill as pimps!

It is no wonder that Mailer loves boxing, or rather loves the symbolism of boxing. His engagement with the black experience has always been limited to the male side of all matters—when Mailer says “Blacks” he means male (an observation also made by Michelle Wallace in her book *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*). And his engagement with boxing has come about largely because its symbolism can be worked out in such an exclusively male arena and in exclusively male terms. What is amazing, in this regard, is Mailer's lack of growth in the years between the publication of “The White Negro” (1957) and *The Fight* (1975). Jazz and the black subterranean urban life served the same purpose in the pages of the essay as boxing and traveling in Africa do in the book. Consider the similarity to the book in tone and content of these quotations from the essay:

. . . Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body. . . .

. . . It is therefore no accident that psychopathy is most prevalent with the Negro. Hated from outside and therefore hating

himself, the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt. . . . But the Negro, not being privileged to gratify his self-esteem with the heady satisfactions of categorical condemnation, chose to move instead in that other direction where all situations are equally valid, and in the worst of perversion, promiscuity, pimping, drug addiction, rape, razor-slash, bottle-break, what-have-you, the Negro discovered and elaborated a morality of the bottom. . . .

Mailer expresses a very simple and very old idea here, namely, that the black male is metaphorically the white male's unconsciousness personified. What is of deeper interest in that formulation is Mailer's homogenization of the black male personality; in effect any black male, from jazz musician to boxer to pimp to bank robber, any black male who is estranged from the bourgeois culture for whatever reason (and the reasons and the choices are far from being the same) is, for Mailer, the same outcast, the same uninhibited, uncivilized self, the same untraumatized noble savage. Ironically, if the black or Latin prizefighter within the code of his own world has absorbed the masculine rites and morality of the Anglo-Saxon West, then as symbol in the larger world he is simply a new type of minstrel, a black face hidden behind an even deeper black-face: the secret shadow-self of the white man's mind. In Mailer's vision, the boxers become clockwork psychopaths; each round in a fight is nothing more than a three-minute drill in regulated aggression, orchestrated and articulated by the writers outside the ring who have come to see boxing not as a sport but as imagistic psychotherapeutic ethics. For Mailer, the good id (Ali) whips the bad id (Foreman). One wishes that Mailer had taken to heart D. H. Lawrence's warning about "cherishing illusions about the race soul, the eternal Negroid soul. . . ."

There is nothing easier than to rake Mailer over the coals for his sexism. I do not intend to do that—first of all because he has been a frequent and quite easy target for feminists in recent years. Secondly, any male who really enjoys boxing is drawn to it at least partly because it is an all-male province, no matter how silly its bravado or how pointlessly dangerous its risks.

The reason why Mailer's book would be open to attack by feminists is related to his conjuring up of Ernest Hemingway whenever he gets the opportunity. Hemingway haunts Mailer and, in this particular instance, one is apt to think that *Death in the Afternoon* looms like a large shadow over Mailer's text. And it is the image of Hemingway that makes one think that Mailer's love of the all-male world of boxing is not the simple recitation of a particular preference but an actual statement of repudiation of any sexually mixed world. To chant the name of Hemingway is merely to give the imprint of genius to any meditation on a world without women.

But in the end, Mailer did not take Hemingway's advice. He tried to write an epic about boxing. The actual fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman had to be one of the most boring on record. The only reason it was of any interest is that everyone in the world was convinced that Ali would lose badly. After all, Foreman had bounced Joe Frazier and Ken Norton around like rubber balls, and those two last fighters gave Ali fits in the ring. But as Angelo Dundee has said, "Styles make a fight," and for this fight with Foreman, Ali had the right style. It was exciting *that* he won, but not *how* he won. The fight took on the same pattern round after round: Ali leaning against the ropes covering up while Foreman flailed away like a windmill. Finally, Foreman was too tired to hold his arms up anymore and Ali knocked him out in the eighth round; a flyweight could have knocked Foreman out by then. Ali's strategy worked only because Foreman was such an abysmally stupid fighter. And the long term bodily effects of the rope-a-dope strategy, which a very lazy Ali adopted as a main feature in his subsequent fights, have yet to be fully realized. Suffice it to say that in the long run Ali may be the big loser. Mailer devotes nearly forty pages in his book to describing the actual combat, a rather dangerous thing to do. A third-rate writer for *The Ring* could have described it in a thousand-word column. Mailer wants to write an epic; he wants to invest his writing with the images of larger-than-life heroes and villains and larger-than-life tragedy and drama. But as Hemingway wrote, ". . . nor is overwritten journalism made literature by the injection of a false epic quality. Remember this too: all bad writers are in love with the epic."

PART 3

If Ernest Hemingway's presence overshadows Norman Mailer's fight pieces, then A. J. Liebling is haunted by the old Victorian fight journalist, Pierce Egan. Liebling's book on boxing, *The Sweet Science* (the title is derived from a phrase coined by Egan), is doubtless the best non-fiction book on boxing since Egan penned pieces on the bare-knuckle brawlers of England in a publication called *Boxiana*. Liebling's essays, which originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, are a purist's journey through the major bouts of the fifties: Sugar Ray Robinson's fights with Joey Maxin and Randy Turpin, Marciano's two bouts with Jersey Joe Wolcott, his two bouts with Ezzard Charles and his fight with Archie Moore. Liebling also covers an early Floyd Patterson fight, Moore's battle with his arch-nemesis Harold Johnson, and a minor Sandy Saddler fight.

Liebling writes as a journalist; he is not obsessed with the epic, so his pieces are not pretentious like Mailer's. At his best, he reminds one of the best of Red Smith. Indeed, Liebling positively revels in the seedy hotel, the wrinkled topcoat, the greasy collar persona of the boxing writer. And because he writes here in the guise of the boxing writer, he is also a purist who loves to listen to the old boys and keep a sharp eye out for the oddballs. The book is filled with presences like Freddie Brown, old time, raspy-voiced trainer whose last famous pupil was the foul-tempered but brilliant Roberto Duran; Al Weill, manager of Rocky Marciano and seeker of "young broken fighters"; Charlie Goldman, trainer of Marciano, who says, "One of the troubles with fighters now is they don't start before they're interested in dames"; and Runyonesque-type characters like Prince Monolulu, an Ethiopian prince who plays the ponies in England, preaches Zionism on Sundays, and has moderate success betting on fights.

Yet in reading this book one gets the impression that Liebling is well aware that he has approached the end of an epoch. The boxers and the bouts, the managers and trainers, the auditoriums where the fights are held, and the audiences that witness them are all part of the past. Liebling sees televised fights as heralding the downfall of the sport:

The immediate crisis in the United States, forestalling the one high living standards might bring on, has been caused by the popularization of a ridiculous gadget called television. This is utilized in the sale of beer and razor blades. The clients of the television companies, by putting on a free boxing show almost every night of the week, have knocked out of business the hundreds of small-city and neighborhood boxing clubs where youngsters had a chance to learn their trade and journeymen to mature their skills. Consequently the number of good new prospects diminishes with every year, and the peddlers' public is already being asked to believe that a boy with perhaps ten or fifteen fights behind him is a topnotch performer. Neither advertising agencies nor brewers, and least of all the networks, give a hoot if they push the Sweet Science back into a period of genre painting. When it is in a coma they will find some other way to peddle their peanuts.

The purist's obsession with standards is not simply a crotchety moralism but a quest for integrity in a world where such a quality is fast vanishing. As it happened, Liebling was right; television absolutely distorted and detached the viewer's ability to see or understand prizefighting and often interfered with the boxer's ability to perform. The viewer is distanced from the struggle and the pain of the ordeal; the vibrating edge of fear and brutality is blunted, is in fact reduced and packaged. Indeed, far from being able "to experience" a fight on television, one is simply manipulated by the camera angles and the commentators. One reacts to the grossness of the occasion without sensing its subtleties. The fighters, in many cases little more than honorable schoolboys who have been advanced too many grades without benefit of instruction, are often in more danger of being seriously injured than would be the case if they were more seasoned performers. Finally, to have taken from the province of the enthusiast and put up for public sale not only the big money and big name fights, but the little ordinary ones as well, is to have reduced the sport to its one most prominent and marketable characteristic—the charismatic flowing of blood. As one of the characters in Budd Schulberg's novel, *The Harder They Fall*, puts it: boxing is "show business with blood."

In the end, it is Liebling's very self-consciousness about his quest for integrity which makes *The Sweet Science* reek

of a high-brow quaint conservatism. To Liebling, the televised boxing match might have been the beginning of a high-tech, grossly inartistic seizure of the manly art of self-defense. But it must be admitted that before television the world of boxing was one of gangsterism, fixed fights, racial baiting and discrimination, severe punch-drunkenness, down-and-out fighters without two nickels to rub together, petty whores, fleece artists, dishonest officials, and a general miasma of corruption and filth. Television was not ruining an art-form; it was buying into a money-making den of iniquity. Nearly any sense of this side of boxing is absent from Liebling's essays. Boxing is not, after all, merely a series of cunningly contrived pieces about its characters written in order to make a low class endeavor palatable to the high-brow readers of *The New Yorker*. This is where Liebling's purist bent leads him astray: the age of the 1940s and early 1950s in pre-television boxing was not the golden age of bare-knuckle fighters that Pierce Egan described during the Victorian era. Perhaps the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s were as innocent as Egan wanted his readers to believe, but the 1940s and 1950s demanded more than the picturesque. Liebling's aim, I think, is clear; *The Sweet Science* was meant to be the romance of modern prizefighting; sportswriting as *belles lettres*. The book was not even meant to be historical romanticism like Egan's pieces but rather sheer requiem for the last artists of integrity. This is why the book is framed with the images of two great black fighters who are in the twilight of their careers: Joe Louis and Archie Moore, two supreme artists making their last stands. When Liebling writes, "[a] boxer, like a writer, must stand alone," the reader knows that the book is making an early claim to its easy moral victory. *The Sweet Science* is nothing more than an effective long goodbye.³

III. YOUNG MAN STREETFIGHTER: AN AMERICAN SKETCH

Let me begin by warning the reader that this will not be an unhappy story.

³ It is deeply ironic that the greatest fighter of all time, Muhammad Ali, should be a creature of television. The world's greatest ring artist shamelessly sold himself like any sponsor's product. Liebling died in 1963 before Ali won the heavyweight title for the first time. Wherever he is now, he must be terribly chagrined by it all.

In the neighborhood where I grew up there was a block called Fairhill Street. Every black American ghetto must have one of these streets, where the houses are so dilapidated, so absolutely ruined that the bricks bulge out in a manner that suggests a kind of sterile pregnancy. Even the inanimate objects seem swollen with grief. Many of the houses, as I remember, were boarded up with wood or sheets of metal, and yellow paper signs would be posted on the front doors which read: THIS PROPERTY IS DECLARED UNFIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION. Of course, people continued to live in these buildings and no one thought anything at all about it. If you were to ask these people why they did not move to more suitable quarters, they would simply tell you that they could afford nothing else; they had no place else to live. They were, I think, wretchedly poor, the poorest black people in the neighborhood. The young children would run around barefoot in the summer, with dirty, cut-up feet, mostly because the parents could not afford the fancy PF flyers and Converse shoes that I and other children wore. The girls on this block were always pregnant before the age of fifteen and the boys in jail before sixteen. In those days, people on welfare did not receive food stamps; they were given government-issued food popularly referred to as "surplus." At school, it was easy to spot the kids whose families received surplus; they always brought lunches that consisted of the whitest white bread in the world and thick, pink, rubbery pieces of Spam or potted meat. Those of us who thought we were better off than our Fairhill Street friends—if only, as in the case of most of us, by the fewest of dollars—would revel in our lunches of greasy steak sandwiches and submarines or glazed doughnuts and soda pop bought from the corner store.

On this street was an empty lot, covered with broken glass, garbage, and the occasional dead body of an animal, where one could usually find members of the Fifth and South Streets gang. And it was on this lot that I saw the greatest fist fight of my life, better than any professional fight I have seen before or since. On a certain day in my youth, Frank White, the warlord of the Seventh Street gang, and Tabu, the warlord of Fifth and South Streets gang, fought in that strange ring for the championship of the streets.

It was an extremely hot August day in my twelfth or thir-

teenth summer. I was loafing in the playground with the boys of the Fifth and South Streets gang. Some of them were playing basketball; most were simply lounging in the shade, listening to R & B on a transistor radio, drinking wine or soda pop, and trying to beat the heat. Tabu was sitting on a bench playing checkers. He loved playing checkers more than anyone else I knew except the old men who played on the front steps of a house on Fairhill Street. Tabu and his opponents always played by the "touch a man, move a man" rule, just as the old men did, which meant that these games were the fastest ever witnessed on a board. Tabu liked me a great deal and this was certainly a curious thing because I had little merit or influence among these boys; I was simply one of the fellows who hung around the fringes. He had a great deal of respect for my intelligence (even in those days I was known for being a bookish boy) which I thought surprising since virtually no one else did. It was an even exchange since I had a great deal of respect for the way he used his dukes. It was a nice friendship; he always called me Slim because he did not like the name Gerald, and I always called him Tabu because I never knew any other name to call him.

Seeing Tabu in my mind's eye, it is hard to imagine that he was the warlord, the best fighter in the gang. He surely had the physique—he was lean and muscular and as hard as steel. But he did not seem to have the temperament. He loved to play basketball and checkers and talk to girls and laugh. He never seemed angry enough with anyone about anything to want to fight. Yet he did fight quite well and quite often and with a bewildering sense of humor. Whenever he had an opponent—whether in a street fight, basketball game or checkers match—at an insurmountable disadvantage, he would shout gleefully, "It's game time and your ass is mine!"

On this hot afternoon, word began to spread through the playground that the Seventh Street gang was "coming down strong" looking to kick the asses of the "punk motherfuckers of Fifth and South." The air was suddenly electric with excitement. The boys, once assured that this was no idle rumor, gathered their weapons and massed themselves and began moving out of the playground to meet the ene-

my. I tagged along mostly to watch. Midway up Fairhill Street we could see the crush of black youthful humanity coming to greet us. We had about fifty members and Seventh Street easily had sixty or seventy. I thought we were outmanned—so much so that, discretion being the better part of valor, it was time to consider beating a hasty retreat. No one else felt that way. When the two gangs did meet face-to-face, there was no violence. The leaders from both groups began to talk, and it was decided, surprisingly, to declare a truce, so that both gangs could unite against the Thirteenth and Fitzgerald Streets gang, the massively manned nemesis of both the Fifth and South and the Seventh Streets gangs. There was some disagreement as to who was to have leadership over this combination and it was decided to have the warlord from each group fight to settle the matter.

The rules of the fight were simple: no kicking, no head-butting, no hitting below the belt, no wrestling, and no rounds. Both boys were to fight until one of them quit. Whoever quit would be the loser.

I did not know Frank White personally but I knew his reputation. He too was lean and muscular but much taller than Tabu. And he had a face which indicated that behind his fire-red eyes was one of the most evil dispositions in all of South Philadelphia. He had a lemon-yellow complexion with freckles and a thick ring of scar tissue around his neck from a knife wound. It was rumored that he had once broken a grown man's jaw in a fist fight. Another rumor was that he had killed a boy in a knife fight and had beaten the rap in court. He looked grim and merciless.

We all sojourned to the empty lot and the principals removed their shirts and shadow-boxed a bit to warm up. It was such a hot day that both boys were sweating heavily even before they faced each other. White had very quick hands and a fluid motion; he looked very, very good to me—much better than Tabu, whose facial expression did not even seem to absorb the gravity of the situation. He was smiling and jocular about all of this. I was afraid for him.

The fight started with both boys exchanging evenly; but White soon pulled out in front, using the advantage of his height and reach. He threw rapid-fire left jabs, then fol-

lowed up with straight rights and left hooks. He was like a smooth-running machine and he never varied his pattern. First, Tabu's nose started to bleed, then his mouth, then little welt marks started to form around his eyes. Tabu was scoring with punches, too. But his hands were not as fast, so he did not land as often. After twenty minutes, both boys were so drenched in sweat that their trousers were soaked and they were nearly exhausted. It was surely surprising that neither passed out from sunstroke. At this point, Tabu was losing badly. Suddenly, he crouched very low as if he were going to spring or lunge a punch. That seemed a sure sign of utter desperation. He stayed in this position for a minute and allowed White to hit with a jab, then another and another. After throwing the left a half-dozen times without missing, White predictably threw a tremendous straight right; it did not miss, although White afterwards probably wished that it had. It was the punch that Tabu was waiting for; he timed it so that as the punch was thrown, he jerked out of his crouch and thrust his head forward like a bull charging. The blow landed on the top of Tabu's skull and White immediately gave a howl of pain. He had either jammed his knuckles on Tabu's hard head or broken his hand. In either case, his right hand was useless. Tabu screamed out, "It's game time and your ass is mine!" Tabu swarmed all over White but the fight went on for another twenty minutes before White, after having been struck so vicious a blow on his chest that a surface blood vessel ruptured, finally sat down on the filthy ground and looked up at Tabu and shook his head. The warlord of Seventh Street had quit. It was Tabu's finest hour; he was the undisputed king of the hill insofar as we poor black boys of South Philadelphia were concerned.

As I grew older and no longer hung around with the neighborhood boys, I wondered what had happened to Tabu. About four years ago, when I visited Philadelphia, I learned the news. I was in a record store called 3rd Street Jazz looking through the stacks when suddenly I heard someone call out, "Hey Slim. Where you been?" I knew the voice right away. I turned and saw Tabu—but what a change from the street days! He was wearing a three-piece suit, carrying a very expensive-looking attache case, sporting a neat-

ly trimmed goatee and mustache, and looked for all the world like the landed gentry of black folk. Was this the same person who had once been my hero back on Fairhill Street? He told me what he had been doing: he had a degree from Temple University and worked as an administrator for a municipal agency. He was going to law school at night and contemplated finishing that degree in two more years. He was married with, as he put it, "four beautiful daughters," all of whom had African names that sounded like pure poetry but which I could not recall the moment after he had spoken them. I was never good at remembering poetry. He still had a good physique but he was beginning to develop a paunchy middle. He told me he played racketball at a health spa he belonged to. He seemed almost sleek with success.

"I had to quit the gang in order to get serious," he said. "I had to stop fighting. You know, some of those cats are still out there. Into the dope thing. Been to prison. And still into the gang thing. Man, they never grew up. Just want to keep street fighting all their lives. You can't go around fist fighting forever. You got to become a man and put that stuff behind you. I just decided to grow up."

We talked about jazz quite a bit. He had become a big fan of "the music." We were discussing Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain* album. Tabu shook his head in admiration: "It's the baddest album out there. Man, it's like Miles telling the other trumpet players, 'It's game time and your ass is mine.' " I smiled. Some things never really change.

As I said in the beginning, this was not intended to be an unhappy story about a ghetto boy. It is, in fact, an American success story of the most familiar sort. The lesson of the story is this: Tabu, and most recently Sugar Ray Leonard, are the only two fighters I have ever heard of who were smart enough to quit before they got old.

GEORGE V. HIGGINS

Ducks and Other Citizens

The Frog Pond in the Boston Public Gardens had been divested of its swan boats and drained low against the winter. The procedure had exposed Budweiser cans and Big Mac wrappers lying filthy on the broad black flats of silt. The headlight and cowcatcher of a silver locomotive, HO gauge, were visible above the surface of the congealing mud close by the pillars of the footbridge, but otherwise the trash of summer was uninteresting. Lester M. Delay touched Torbert Roberts on the right arm and made him pause halfway across. "The ducks," he said.

The ducks, four mallard hens and two drakes, swam contentedly in the pools of dirty water lying stagnant in the lower areas of the Frog Pond. "I don't think," Lester said, "those are what a thoughtful estate planning counsellor would choose for his examples of provident anticipation of the future, would you say, Torbert?" Lester wore a Haband New Process dark blue raincoat which had spent some time rolled up and thrown into the back seats of automobiles he had checked out of the motor pool for the purpose of conducting official government business on days when it looked like it might rain. He had lost most of his brown hair between his eyebrows and the midpoint of his scalp; what remained was curly and tufted out above the tortoise-shell bows of his glasses and his ears.

"Probably not," Roberts said, "now that you mention it. Although I'm not sure any of our clients ever came into our office with that kind of advice in mind anyway." He carried a Burberry raincoat and wore a blue chalk-striped suit which was ten percent cashmere for softness to the touch.

"Yeah," Lester said. "Staying out of jail is probably what's generally the thing that's uppermost, their minds."

"Generally speaking, yes," Roberts said.

"Your clients are not stupid," Lester said. "A little casual about the laws pertaining to the possession of controlled substances with intent to offer them for distribution, maybe, but not stupid."

"No," Roberts said, "not stupid. Occasionally a trifle overconfident, perhaps, but as a rule not stupid. Merchant princes born into the wrong era—that's how they picture themselves."

"And you fellows more or less encourage that," Delay said.

"I'll put it this way, Lester," Roberts said. "We figure that if what they wanted was a lot of tedious sermonizing and improving moral uplift, they would not be coming to see us. They'd be over at King's Chapel, getting good seats for the noonday services, or something along that line."

"Where their contributions," Lester said, "would probably not finance long lunches in the Ritz Carlton dining room quite as often as their legal fees seem to provide them for their lawyers."

"And the law-school classmates of their lawyers, as far as that goes," Roberts said.

"Your point's well taken, Counsellor," Delay said. "I must mention it to Washington in my next memo to files that no one reads, further evidence that prosperity does trickle down and sometimes even dampens government employees who chose their friends with wisdom back in law school twenty years ago and more. You are not stupid, Torbert."

"This is true," Roberts said.

"Ducks on the other hand," Lester M. Delay said, "ducks are stupid. Although probably no more stupid, pound for pound, than I have been, and nowhere near as long, either. The winters must knock off most of them that try to hang around this place year-round."

"It isn't nice to fuck around with Mother Nature," Roberts said.

"Or with the narcs, as far as that goes," Lester said, "although I doubt smart lawyers can do much for you when it's Ma Nature that you're screwing with, and they can do you some good if it's the other thing."

"Like I say," Roberts said, "very few of my clients have been ducks. I'm not familiar with their problems on a first-hand basis."

"Oddly enough," Delay said, "to a certain degree, I am. Your average tame duck, I think it's safe to say, has got no sense at all and damned little need of any. He comes into this world with his future all mapped out for him. The details aren't going to be decided until after he is dead, of course, since who is going to eat him with a little cherry sauce or maybe some orange slices doesn't come into the Ritz and order him served up until after he has gone to his reward, but that won't concern him much no matter who it is. Doesn't matter one damned bit to him whether it's some high-powered lion of the criminal defense bar who by chance turns out to be the gentleman who chews him up, or some humble servant of the public freeloading on the riches learned counsel's gained from helping major pushers give the law the slip, him being dead and all when the question is resolved. The general outlines of his life are pretty well established before he inhales his first piece of grain. He is born, or more accurately, laid, although not in the usual sense of that word. He is fattened and he is fattened fast, so he gets good and chubby while he's still a tender adolescent. He is in due course slaughtered, plucked and cooked, all in the course of orderly procedures that've evolved over many years and work to everybody's satisfaction. Except his, of course, but then nobody else involved in the whole process cares much about his view of things at any rate, so that's irrelevant. Your tame duck comes into this world knowing what he can expect, if he knows anything at all, and if he doesn't know a damned thing, which seems the most likely, it doesn't matter anyway. All the domestic ducks I've seen have been perfectly serene about their lot in life and have shown no ulcer symptoms whatsoever."

"You must know a lot of ducks," Roberts said. "You must be on pretty familiar terms with quite a few of them."

"Not all that many, actually," Lester said. "This is more a matter of informed inductive reasoning. Reflection based upon thoughtful consideration of basic knowledge about a

few ducks I have known, extrapolated to admit conclusions applicable to the generality of ducks which share their common circumstances."

"You probably have the leisure to indulge these philosophical speculations," Roberts said, "if your work day's put in for a government salary check and you don't have to spend each minute of it doing actual work for some existing client if you hope to get some income from it."

"Admittedly," Delay said. "There is a certain spaciousness to government employment which I understand is lacking in the private sector. It doesn't wholly compensate for the dowdiness of the plumage and the luxury of the lifestyle available in other enterprises requiring similar talents, but it is pleasant, no doubt about it."

"Everything's a trade-off," Roberts said.

"Precisely," Delay said. "Your run-of-the-mill wild duck, for example."

"You've also pondered the wild ducks," Roberts said. "Gone into this area in some detail, haven't you?"

"Yes indeed," Delay said. "Your wild duck is quite a different customer as compared to your domesticated duck. From the first day that your wild duck rams his beak out of his shell, which is probably a mistake if he took the time to analyze the risks involved or had any access whatsoever to reliable information about what's probably in store for him, he is shooting crap with destiny. Which, as we all know, is always exhilarating, but can be very dangerous. There he is, the cuddly little down creature staggering around up there in the taller marsh grass of the Maritimes or some other place of hospitality in Canada, his mummy teaching him to swim and how to dive and don't forget to come back up when you stick your head beneath the water to scout up some nice succulent weed or something, Junior, and all that he's got on his mind in this wide and wonderful world is sprouting nice green feathers and some shiny blue ones, maybe, so he can strut around the flock and take his pleasure with the ladies. Not what you would call the model of a sober citizen if you were to transport him and his behavior to the human world of commerce, but then again no freak of nature in that context either. Would you say, Torbert?"

"Most assuredly not," Roberts said. "A very common attitude. From what I've heard, that is."

"Of course," Delay said. "This wild duck, if he's lucky, and I think we're pretty much agreed that lucky is by far the only way to go, does not in his first seasons on the earth get pounced on by a fox that felt his growling hunger pangs overcome his distaste for wet feet and ventured out upon the duck's marsh hummocks. He does not get swooped down on by a hawk that'd gotten bored with fish for dinner. He does not get swallowed whole by some large and hungry bluefish or basking shark while he's out browsing for his own grub. He makes a safe round trip south for his first winter in the sun and north again for his first summer full of nonstop nooky up in Canada—no violent storms ice up his wings and send him crashing off-course to the ground, and no gunner blows his ass off while he's in a descent vector over Chesapeake Bay to stop to get a bite to eat.

"It is not," Delay said, "a secure life that your wild duck leads, and I don't mean to suggest that. But still and all, it does have its points, you must admit. If he is quick, fortunate and careful, he can make it to a ripe old age without anybody giving one good shit whether he gets tough and stringy in his middle years. To him it doesn't matter one rat's ass what some ungrateful bastard name of Torbert Roberts thinks he might relish for his lunch. To him that is a matter of complete indifference, because from birth he gave up the comforts and security of the pen out in the barnyard that are available only to those ducks that respond in the affirmative to the invitation to get roasted up for you."

"And you as well," Roberts said. "Look, Les, all right? I don't mean to suggest that I don't find this entertaining, and it is delightfully warm and sunny for December, but I do have some stuff back at that office that I've got to get to, you know? And I think we've covered pretty much what we had to talk about, unless I'm pretty much mistaken."

Delay touched Roberts on the arm again. "Hear me out, Bert," he said. "The life of the private practitioner with a demanding practice can get pinched if he's not careful. You've played golf at Augusta National, you've told me, while I was hacking divots out of concrete fairways more paved than

manicured by the Metropolitan District Commission. Remember what Bobby Jones advised: you've got to stop and smell the roses along the way."

"I thought that was Mac Davis," Roberts said.

"See?" Delay said. "That's what I mean. Your intellectual realm has gradually become constricted to the culture that's available on the cassettes you play through your Blaupunkt radio as you travel through this lively world cocooned in your Mercedes. Pitiabile, Roberts, pitiabile." He rested his elbows on the green-patined railing of the footbridge and nodded down toward the bitter-ending drakes turning in the brackish pools. "There is education for us everywhere we look, Bert, even in the contemplation of those ducks. Take me, for instance. I think that I have much in common with these ducks that we find here. I'm not sure I find that thought totally agreeable, but that's the way it goes.

"Like me," Delay said, "those ducks are quite unrealistic. Odds on they dropped in here en route to Canada last spring, just an overnigher to break the long trek homeward. And when they woke up the next morning they weren't any colder'n they'd been the night before when they checked in on Long Island. Perhaps they were slightly warmer—this water's shallow all the time, and there aren't any tides to change it. A few warm days in springtime could probably make it reasonably comfortable, at least by the standards of a duck. Ducks aren't very demanding, in most cases. So they swam around in it some, and the next thing you know it's early afternoon and there're people on their way through here just like we are today, only it was springtime and they were on their way to Fenway to see Yaz hold off old age another year. Carefree happy souls they were, most likely bought themselves some peanuts and some popcorn, maybe some Crackerjacks if they had kids with them, saw no reason why they shouldn't share their goodies with the ducks. Which of course to these itinerant, transient ducks, was like manna from the very heaven. 'How about this, huh Herbie? Water's nice and warm, get tired of swimming you can pull up over on either one these little islands here, preen your feathers and take a little sun, no wild animals or anything to come along and bother you. Not bad,

huh? You think of any reason why we should beat our brains out flying all the way to Canada, we can stay right here, perfectly safe, and people passing through without a shotgun in the bunch of them'll bring us lunch like room service? Don't make no sense to me, leave this little set-up here. I think I'll stay.'

"And that of course was what they did," Delay said. "Just like I did when we came out of law school and I got myself a billet with the federal government and snuggled in, all nice and warm. Just like summer for the ducks here, the years went by and I was warm and cozy and well-fed. Not quite as well-fed as my domesticated brothers who accepted flattering opportunities with major Boston law firms, but then nobody including me had it in mind that I should fatten up like they did, become one of those gross fowls that waddle around ponderously around the barnyard looking silly and feeling most important. I still had a theoretical kind of freedom and some vestiges of my dignity. I owed no allegiance to any grubby capitalistic client. I didn't have to tug my forelock bashfully when some mogul showed up in the office, or kiss any large investor on the ass because his company had me and my senior partners on an annual retainer that we couldn't live without. All I had to do was inhale and exhale on a fairly regular basis, meet the moderate demands of reasonable devotion to the public service, and I was free to spend my hours off-duty siring offspring and delighting in their progress toward mature adulthood. Which I did and which they've done, just as though we'd been a family of these ducks here tenanting those little islands.

"At the same time," Lester said, "while I was absolved of the burdens of practice with a large firm, I was spared the risks of high-rolling sole practitioners and other buccaneers like you, Torbert. In my innocence when we came out of law school, I thought the major hazard that you wild ducks were confronting was the possibility you would starve to death."

"Which," Roberts said, "was a genuine consideration."

"Don't doubt it for a minute," Lester said, "and I still don't. You played for high stakes and you could've lost the whole pot, and I never did that. I didn't have the nerve. So

today I've made perhaps the third visit of my lifetime to the place where you have lunch about three times a week. I don't begrudge you that."

"Good thing," Roberts said drily, "because I don't get there that often. These excursions as you may have noticed tend to chomp a large chunk out of the hours available in the average working day."

"I know, I know," Delay said. "Piaget time is much more valuable than Seiko time. But hear me out, again I say, because we don't have these conferences that often and it's important to make sure that they're complete."

"I'm listening," Roberts said, "but I'm going to tell you once again just what I told you over lunch: I won't deny I've got the clout to help a fellow that I like who's qualified and wants a judgeship. And I like you and I can readily understand why a judgeship would look nice to you at this point. With the retirement you've got coming from old Uncle Sam, and what they're paying now for judges, that'd be a very nice combined income for a man who's not yet fifty to have guaranteed forever. The thing is, Lester, you're not qualified, and it doesn't matter how much I may like you or how far back we go together, or what the governor owes to me or thinks he does, as long as that's the case. It's not the same now as it used to be, when those judgeships didn't pay a whole lot. The salaries went up to sixty grand on the argument you had to pay that to get people who were qualified, and that means that nobody now dares to appoint a guy who isn't qualified. Which you, sad to say, are not. Nobody's questioning your brains. Nobody says you haven't got a spotless reputation. Nobody suggests for even one short minute that you haven't got the real ability to do the job. What you don't have is the trial experience. You've never really been in court. You've spent the whole of these past twenty years sitting in an office, and that's not what they look for."

"I realize that," Delay said. "That's what I mean about these ducks and me. They're not bright enough to realize the winter's coming and they'd best fly south if they don't want to die. And I've got three kids getting set for college, which I cannot pay for on the salary that I make now or have any chance of making by the time all three of them are

running up tuition bills, so it behooves me to be bright enough to see it's time for me to take that pension and acquire another job that pays big money by my standards. Otherwise I'm just as stupid as the ducks."

Roberts shrugged. "I see your point," he said. "I wish that I could say I'll help you and your uneasy days are over. And I can say that, but you're a fool if you believe me and I'll be damned if I'll lie to you even if you would believe me. You've spent your whole career behind a desk. That isn't what they're looking for."

"Ah," Lester said, "but isn't it important what I did behind that desk?"

"In a word," Roberts said, "no."

"I think it is," Delay said. "Let me tell you why, and after I get through then all you have to do is tell whether you agree with me after all, and that'll do it for today. Hell, for all time. You don't agree with me and say so here, and I promise that I'll never come to you and ask you for a single thing again."

"Oh yeah?" Roberts said.

"Promise," Delay said.

"Done," Roberts said.

"What I did behind that desk," Delay said, "was inventory raw tapes which we'd made by means of electronics surveillance devices."

"I know that," Roberts said. "For Christ sake, how many of my clients did you sink with your goddamned bugs and taps? I don't even want to think about it." Delay laughed. "Sure," Roberts said, "go ahead and laugh, but don't think that'll help you to convince me that you should have what you want. I heard those tapes of yours at length, my friend. I know all about them, and so do the juries that sat and listened to them with me."

"No," Delay said, "that's where you're wrong, you see, when you say that you've heard those tapes of mine and claim that you know all about them. You don't, although you think you do. What you know all about are those tapes which I allowed to be transcribed for prosecutors who were making cases in the grand jury. What you know all about are those tapes which I selected."

"There were others," Roberts said.

"Many others," Delay said. "Some of them were merely cumulative. How many miles of tape did we need, for example, to secure conviction of your valued client Felix, huh?"

"Good old Felix," Roberts said. "That man nearly drove me insane. Paid me a lot of money, bless him, but nearly drove me nuts. I swear that lad was born holding a phone in each hand. You got any idea how many times a day that guy would call me?"

"Yes," Delay said.

Roberts glanced at him quickly. "Yes?" he said.

"Most assuredly," Delay said. "I have a very accurate knowledge of how often Felix called you. More than that, I have a vivid recollection of the things that he discussed with you. Things which never did come out in court."

"Well, goddamnit, Les," Roberts said, "I should hope they didn't. Those conversations that he had with me, for Christ sake, those came under the attorney-client privilege. I mean, I know old Felix there was no ornament to this Republic when he was on the loose, but he did enjoy the same rights that everybody else has. You're not telling me I should be grateful or do something for you because you shortstopped tapes you made of me when I was talking to my clients?"

"Torbert, Torbert," Lester said, "let's not concern ourselves with questions about whether what I ask of you is gratitude. Let's confine ourselves to hard facts about which we both have some knowledge. Pretty much the same knowledge, when you come right down to it. Facts like subornation of perjury, intimidation of witnesses, presentation of testimony at trials in courts of law by lawyers who knew that it was perjured and who connived in its preparation. That stuff isn't covered by the privilege, Bert, aiding and abetting clients to commit further crimes in order to escape conviction for offenses previously committed. That's stuff that's criminal as well, Bert. That's stuff that they disbar guys for, and send the notices to them at their temporary addresses at the federal guesthouse down in Danbury, all right?"

Roberts swallowed. He did not say anything.

"Of course it is, Bert," Delay said. "I may lack courtroom

experience, and it's true I've never tried a case myself, but even I know that."

"I see," Roberts said.

"Now," Delay said, "this is all I'm asking you to do, all right? I think a clever advocate, knowing that the governor has to believe the candidate that he appoints to wear the judge's robe is qualified to run trials in a court of law, could argue quite persuasively that there's more than one way of acquiring an informed sense of what should be offered into evidence and what adds nothing to a trial. In my case, for example, I could see that Felix was going down the toilet no matter how much fancy perjury he drummed up with the assistance of his lawyer, and I knew our witnesses were safe from his threatening attentions. The government after all did not start out to grab the lawyers for old Felix. It was Felix that we wanted, and there was no point that I could see in cluttering up the case against the man we wanted with a lot of other cases against attorneys who really should have known better than to humor Felix when he thought up schemes, but didn't. So I held those tapes out, the tapes that showed beyond a reasonable doubt what had gone on when Felix realized his tail was in the crack, and just as I'd expected, Felix was convicted. I ask you, Torbert, don't you think that shows I have the judgment to sit on the bench, despite the fact I've never spent a day before it?"

Roberts cleared his throat. "Well," he said, "there certainly is much in what you say."

"Thank you, Bert," Delay said. "It just shows you how much useful wisdom a fellow can acquire, if he pays attention to the ducks."

"Especially," Roberts said, "assuming that's some kid's lost toy train down there and not some new device I haven't run across before, if that wisdom is the kind that prompts a man to hold his more important conversations out of doors."

ROBERT PACK

Ferns by the Waterfall

I knew you'd marry again. Mom's been dead two years, and I'm prepared. She'd sit there on that ledge beside the pool; she loved to read while savoring an orange or a pear as I was catching tadpoles like a boy, searching for salamanders under logs. I always had to call her twice before she'd hear and lift her head up from her book—as if she wasn't quite sure where we were. Janet has hiked back here with me; she's seen the pool swirling below the waterfall. She took her clothes off once and dove right in.

Don't feel obliged to ask if it's all right with me for you to marry—you're still young, you have your needs; no one should live alone—or die alone. If you love Janet, marry her, she can decide whether your doctoring will leave you time for her. What troubles me is how Mom died. Why did she go alone to swim at night so late in September under the waterfall? She never went there by herself before. When she got home, shivering to the bone, she woke me up to ask if I would rub her back and arms; I couldn't break out of my dream in which somebody—maybe you—was strangling her, and I still have the strangest feeling that the dream repeated something I once saw. I'll wake at night, thinking I hear her moan, and then I see you in the hospital, your stethoscope around your neck like some great spider hanging from its threads, saying: "We doubt there is a link between the chill and what shock later caused her heart to stop."

Soon I'll be leaving home, I'm seventeen;
 there's more I need to know. Why did I dream
 she stole off to my waterfall? Climbing
 a ridge, trying to escape from someone,
 she called out, but no words would come, only
 slobbering sounds. And as I woke, wanting
 to help her with the words, just as he reached
 her throat and covered her, I dove into
 the pool, and heard those sounds on my own lips.
 I still feel I'm stuttering when we talk.

Had I seen Janet before mother died?
 She's not like Mom at all; she'd rather hike
 than read or listen to a symphony;
 she knows the names of ferns: Elk's Horn, Hare's Foot,
 and Maidenhair. I can't imagine how
 you met, and yet it seems I know her from—
 another life. I saw her watching me
 when we were naked at the pool. "Look how
 the light reflecting from the water makes
 the birch limbs dance," she said, then coming close
 she gazed at me, a long, slow gaze: "Bird's Nest,"
 she added, "all ferns love the shade," as if
 her list was finally complete. Mother
 also loved ferns, but not out in the wild;
 her flowers were arranged, circled by ferns,
 yellow balancing blue, and with a touch
 of purple or red—Nature, for her taste,
 didn't make the right designs, squandering
 its colors unwatched in the woods. Mornings
 you'd pluck one red or purple flower from
 Mom's yellow vase to grace your button-hole.

I've needed us to sit beside the pool,
 listening to the waterfall, before
 you marry Janet; and I'll pick some ferns
 for us to eat tonight. We were alone
 before she had the killing stroke, and Mom
 asked in the hospital: "The ferns, I need
 to know all of their names." April's the time
 when they begin uncurling into fronds;
 now that they're tender, they're called fiddleheads.

ROBERT PHILLIPS

Queen Anne's Lace

In memory of Isabella Gardner, 1915–1981

I came to the end of Long Island to gather
thoughts and conclude
some piece of writing or other.
Instead I found this mood:

Grief over your sudden departure,
debris of our friendship's growth.
Belle, hours before your death
you called and we spoke. Later

I cried. You'd thanked me for what
I'd not remembered doing. Your purpose,
valedictory. You knew. That night
at the hotel, death gave room service.

Once I dedicated a poem to you
(you never saw it) on autumn crocus.
Something in their rarity, I suppose,
reminded me of you.

After our one real quarrel, I struck
the dedication. It shames me now,
watching the rain, realizing
your gift was to bestow.

When I came to this spartan place,
I couldn't take the bleakness,
so picked some Queen Anne's Lace
that choked the gravelled ways.

Jarred, it stayed rigorously vital,

and for weeks it reminded me of you—
not autumn, but a summer view—
delicate, indestructible.

Before we really met, I thought:
“Our American Edith Sitwell!”—commanding
in your sweeping cape of night,
imperiously tall, spangly earringed.

Like Dame Edith’s, yours too was facade:
Inside, sitting dutifully in the music room
of a parents’ Boston home, a little redhead
waited for someone to share a game.

A constellation of blossoms, each individually
stemmed, the blooms *are* lace, naturally,
but also fireworks, diamond clusters,
celestial spiders, snowflakes. So much

intricacy and simplicity! Your love-
poems, Belle, one feels approach
their art. Inevitable spontaneity.
Just as these appear not merely white,

but an essence of white and green,
absence and presence, dying and living,
nothing in nature is sure. Like life.
Like Piaf, you had no regrets.

Queen Anne’s Lace has no smell.
I remember yours—what was the perfume?
Always the same, feminine, eternal.
I’d know it in any room.

Hidden at the heart of the umbel,
one spot of black, like yours
acquaintances steered clear of,
toward the end. Drink covered it.

If removed, placed on white paper,

that dot is perceived as purple.
A touch of the royal?
A trompe-l'oeil?

I remember best our evenings, a spot
called "Simply Good," where the cuisine
matched the name, and the talk—a riot
of anyone we'd ever known.

We brought wine, the owner had
no license. Taking license,
I told "naughty" jokes. You winced,
then laughed fully. Generous as a weed.

You dazzled, and only the odd friend
knew of the son, lost
somewhere in South America; lost,
too, the daughter in Bedlam; the husband

who kicked you out and married
a younger, only to summon you again,
a lifetime later, on his famous deathbed.
How you agonized that decision—

To go or not to go? You left well enough
alone. Belle, my co-conspirator,
you survived, bereft,
haunting the Chelsea as before.

EUGENE STEVENSON

The Compass, at Night

Tonight you are sleeping
with me.

My head is in the east,
my toes point due west
at the long golden-setting
of the sun.

My arm curls
over the southward stretch
of your breasts and hips.
Soft good nights, a few
lingering kisses,
and at the edge of sleep,
a gentle turn to face
the tree tops in the north.

Most nights there are curls in
the map of the bed.

Head to east north east,
feet to west north west,
arms to the north east.
The eyes survey the trees
then close.
Our backs touch,
mark off enough territory,
my back south to your north,
you tucked up
to the south east and south west.

On the nights you do not sleep
with me, I stretch for
the south, stay in my camp,
the north side of the mattress,
but fall asleep with effort,

face to the hilltops south,
counting the odds of
staying on this map.

The compass, at night,
provides no direction, even
when read.
On the nights you sleep with me
at least there is comfort, or,
lacking comfort, a partner in
this journey through the trees,
over the hills, north and south,
to the next checkpoint in the dark.

PAUL MARIANI

News That Stays News

I don't know but it might have been
the summer of '58, July, time thickening
or thinning like heavy fog on a slick
country road, the headlights spattering
as if they'd hit a wall. What I do remember
as though it were yesterday is my father

down in the engine room under the pool
at Baumann's Day Camp trying to fix
the leaking chlorine tank, fiddling with
the rows of valves and meters and me standing
on the metal grid ladder over him my hand
on the drum door and then the thick yellow gas

seeping up and catching him staggering sideways
 like a Bowery drunk gagging for air as he made it
 out his green mouth retching so that he was
 straight out for two days. All I caught
 was a mouthful of the stuff and that left me
 weak-kneed and my lungs rasping, enough of a taste

so that it still smells every time I dive
 into a motel pool. It was mustard gas killed
 my mother's father and don't let anyone tell me
 different, though it took fifteen years to do the job,
 the cloud hugging the shelled ground as it rolled
 in over that no-man's-land with the dawn breeze

before it hunkered down on those trapped there
 in the trench without their masks. Gas. Gas.
 Outlawed in the twenties and then again repeatedly.
 And now, after the Army has finally admitted
 to the effects of Agent Orange on our own boys
 (to say nothing of what it did to tree and Cong),

the other side is seeding its own rain of terror,
 yellow spoilt-grain toxins rocketlaunched by Jeep
 and helicopter into Laos and Kampuchea, Yemen
 and Afghanistan, dumbstruck villagers including
 pigs and babies, left to drown in their own blood,
 faces gone black from that internal strangulation,

so that I sit on the edge of my easychair before
 the T.V. screen and pound on the arm rest
 with my clenched right fist again, again, until
 my sons look up, one from his comic book the other
 from his world history homework, wondering
 what all this new commotion is about.

PHYLLIS THOMPSON

The Ghosts of Who We Were

On this humid December afternoon
Tall clusters of shell ginger, borne out of reach,
Hang over the sidewalk, quiet and undemanding as prayer.

But because you and I have separate lives now
In regions of the world far from one another
Who were once at peace here, resolved in our happiness,

Because we are divided by more than water
And land and climate, I think of winter in a place
Halfway between us, where our spirits are waiting

As night comes on. These ghosts of who we were
Do not sleep. They wade in the high winds
Of a midcontinental blizzard, until they stand

Beyond the piled snowdrifts where they can see railtracks
Disappearing both directions, west and east.
Assured, they are as cold as trees.

They wait. Then the tracks begin to ring on the ties,
And, as the ties brace for the weight of many cars,
A bell clatters, and a wheeling light drives a bright beam

Far ahead through dense snowflakes. Then they grip hands,
The land shudders, and the train wails by the crossing.
They stare after it a long time, down the road they cannot
go.

This is the same way they will face ice of the last abyss
Together—brave, sure of their ground, hands fast
In a promise made years ago, stronger than either of us,
More silent and powerful than difference or distance or
change.

SYDNEY LEA

Burning the Christmas Tree

The old year flown, a new revolved:
the vivid toys assimilated,
the once-used ribbons spooled and saved,
disposed of—the ones that use had faded.
This yearly try after holiday
to kindle a spirit that hadn't quite been
sufficiently there. My brothers and I
and later my sisters: all standing in
what, in that season, should always have been
a dazzle of snow.

The garden Eros
—blinded both by nature and weather—
upheld a tray whose portion of frost
gripped the single shaft of a feather.

A first match stuttered and died in the breath
of the wind. Our own breaths shot from the yard
like startled quail. From underneath
Father's mild oaths, imperfectly heard,
at length a minuscule needle would flare,
and then in time we heard the crackle
(like the crumple of giftpaper—partridges, stars
inscribed thereon). Each year this ritual,
not then so known, impelling tears
in memory now.

Like the stab of a gale.
All Christmas burned as we hugged each other,
brother, father, sister, mother.
The quick flames stripped our tree to a quill.

“He is midwife to the soul” H.D.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Glenn Gould: Prophet

GLENN GOULD'S DEATH LATE LAST YEAR robbed us of a superb musician, a disturbing, always titillating cultural presence, an innovator in at least two arts, and a generally substantial contributor to the gaiety of nations. He is, of course, an important loss. But his passing does force us to look back at what he has left behind and take seriously what many of us (I include myself) dismissed as eccentricity, wilfulness or worse while he lived. The heaviest burden for pundits, musicians and practically anyone else who encountered Gould through his recordings, essays, lectures and radio and television talks is his advocacy of the recording studio as the consecrated venue of a new age of musical and cultural liberation, a venue by way of whose technological virtuositities a heightened, cleansed and more perfect union of musical work, performer and listener might issue.

Gould often provoked the "worse" I speak of above. His abandonment of the concert stage in the midst of a successful international career, and his vaunted "rethinking" of tempo, of structural articulation, of piano touch and tone, of the relationship of instrument to instrumentalist—added to the apparently uncontrollable vocal descant with which he accompanied most of his performances, his oddities of dress and demeanor, and the steady spate of prose bristling with sometimes adolescent wit and notions that were either meant to scandalize or to be read as facetiousness—all of this and more that went with the face Gould turned to the world was taken as evidence of everything from derangement to self-serving calculation. He was branded an intellectual charlatan or perhaps just a stand-up comic for the elite. His career after he renounced the concert hall was called an elaborately fashioned garb to hide his personal insecurities or his guilt at having caved in to stage fright. His sense of inadequacy led him, it was said, to more and more strenuous self-justification and a more frenzied search for intellectual havens, no matter how isolated. All of this ignores the fact that, to the end, his instrumental technique and musicianship remained prodigious—hard to do if you are losing your mind. And it ignores the possibility that, despite his prose's oblique and at times almost rococo cast, despite the defensive tone and the begged questions, Gould meant what he so often said.

Glenn Gould's unique and varied achievement demands that we

view him as a prophet, one who, turning his back on standard expectations, retreats into the wilderness and eventually returns with revelations. A large group of his colleagues and one-time admirers, along with commentators and those with a vested interest in the perpetuation of our concert-going routines—artists' managers, for instance—have scorned him as a *false* prophet. But it is as a prophet, it seems clear, that Gould himself would want to be judged.

It is inescapable, at the same time, that before he took up the cudgels for what his biographer-apologist Geoffrey Payzant calls "the New Philosophy,"¹ Gould was an extraordinary pianist, and that this was the necessary precondition for the missionary role he assumed after 1964. Like practically everything about the man, the roots and the character of his piano playing were a subject of controversy. Commentators like to say that he sprang from no school of piano style, either historical or pedagogical, and left no school behind. In *High Fidelity* magazine in January of this year, David Hamilton went further: "In an historically-minded age, he remained an old-fashioned nonhistorical performer—and not merely in his insistence on playing Bach on the piano. Every aspect of his playing—tempos, phrasings, dynamics, textural conceptions, and of course expressive character—grew principally from Gould's own inner resources, from his acute if highly personal perception about each individual work and from his very decided musical sympathies and antipathies."²

Hamilton is an especially astute observer of musical style. Yet his words have the ring of truth without, in my view, being entirely true. As Hamilton acknowledges, Gould admired the piano playing of Artur Schnabel, and called him not just a formative influence, but an idol. "I think, in part," he said in 1959, "it was because Schnabel seemed to be a person who didn't really care very much about the piano as an instrument. The piano was a means to an end, for him, and the end was to approach Beethoven."³ Such concern not with instrumental sound and technical mastery but rather with musical sense and structure was an abiding theme in Gould's career, as in Schnabel's, and connects the former solidly with the twentieth-century Germanic school of musical thought and performance. The thread that elevates structure to the central place in composition runs from Brahms through Schoenberg's Second Viennese School, and parallels a historical concern that focused fresh attention on the contrapuntal practices and musical means of the early German Baroque—the soil that nurtured the neo-Baroque composing style of Hindemith and the Bach performing style of Rosalyn Tureck, another confessed influence on Gould.

¹ Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould, Music and Mind* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1978).

² David Hamilton, "Glenn Gould (1932–1982)," *High Fidelity*, Volume 33, No. 1, p. 56.

³ Payzant, p. 6.

These forces created the attitudes that persisted in Gould's work to the end. He was a Bach specialist par excellence, and his perspective on rendering Bach on the piano drew on his experience with the harpsichord and organ as well. His first public performance was not on the piano but on the organ, and he made a recording of part of *Art of the Fugue* on a Toronto "Baroque revival" organ designed to sound like central-German instruments on which the linear voices of Bach's, Sweelinck's and Buxtehude's compositions were first sounded. He also entertained a lifelong passion for the music of Orlando Gibbons and William Byrd, intended for performance on the harpsichord and virginals, and his ideals of piano sound stemmed as much from these Baroque instruments as from the resources of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century pianoforte.

Gould once said that he preferred Tureck's Bach to that of Casals, Landowska and Edwin Fischer, who played with too much *rubato*.⁴ In this remark he could be drawing the line between the new Germanic school and the old Germanic school, to which at least Casals and Fischer indisputably belonged. Comparison of Gould's performances of the Preludes and Fugues of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (Columbia D3S-733 and D3M 31525) with those of an exponent of the old Germanic school, Arthur Loesser (Telarc 5029-5), is instructive. In the first place, Gould is decidedly the more assured master of the instrument: his clean passage-work, command of rapid movement, precise articulation and control of dynamics are unmatched by Loesser.

But moving beyond these things to style, the differences are marked. Loesser calls on the full resources of the modern piano, a Leviathan with tonal capacities undreamed of in Bach's day. The sustaining pedal, the exploitation of a broad dynamic range from *pp* to *fff*, the unabashed ritards at points of structural transition and the occasional octave doubling in the bass are all part of an arsenal that propounds the kinship of these pieces with the preludes of Chopin and Rachmaninoff. Gould is more chaste: within a limited range of loud and soft, he often uses "terrace dynamics"—the maintenance of a steady dynamic level across a structural span. Take the example of Number 12 in Book I. Gould's slow tempo in the Prelude can seem mannered to some ears, a charge leveled at him for his treatment of music—Mozart, Brahms, some Beethoven—with which he had less sympathy than he did with Bach's. But the fugue's ceaseless cumulative progress and bright sequences are a delight heard next to Loesser's more heavily freighted delivery.

The choice is easy. Gould's grasp of the creative logic and inner balances that animate these works, married to a superb instrumental technique, renders them to ear and mind more satisfactorily than anyone else has done in my experience of hearing them in concert and on records. You cannot count other pianists out com-

⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

pletely: listen, if you can, to what Wilhelm Backhaus, a master of the "old" German school, makes of No. 15 of Book I (London Stereo Treasury STS 15065). Here the sheer exuberance of the playing—playing, moreover, of wonderful clarity and structural finesse—push the music into an exaltation that neither Gould nor Loesser reach. But such isolated instances cannot displace Gould. He is the prime Bach pianist of our era, unequaled for what Harris Goldsmith, dean of *High Fidelity's* piano critics, calls "superbly enlivened articulation, his ecstatic, lapidarian elegance, his abrasive bumptiousness and rock-solid rhythmic sense."⁵

That is the prologue. In his anxiety not to be just another musician, another traveling showman shuffling and spreading his bag of tricks before audiences at each stop, Gould bolted the circuit in 1964. Thereafter he devoted himself—sometimes singlehanded, sometimes with the help of CBC colleagues and willing editors, interviewers and others—to exploiting, refining and rationalizing the possibilities inherent in recording technology for the creator and the performer. Confessing to a lifelong fascination with radio broadcasting, the microphone and the tape recorder, he created a series of innovative radio plays whose thematic development and skeins of overlapping "contrapuntal" voices he likened to music. At the same time, along with an unbroken series of recordings, he granted interviews, videotaped broadcasts and wrote articles and record-liner notes in a continuous impassioned defense of his conversion and gloss of the technological promised land.

A recording, Gould exhorted us to recognize, is a fundamentally different thing from a public performance, and not a replica of it, not a carbon copy whose value derives from the degree to which it resembles the "original." Nor, Gould believed, is a recorded performance inherently less musical or authentic than one delivered before an audience, and the fact that the recording may draw from a number of takes—that it may be assembled from sections of tape recorded at different times and even occasionally different places—is irrelevant to a judgment of its value or its musicality.

When the scales fall from our eyes, he said, we can see that the technology of recording creates conditions that can lift the musical experience above the limitations imposed on it by the concert hall. The recording studio liberates the performer and the music he makes from what Gould called "the inexorable linearity of time." It can uniquely provide the performer—and ultimately the listener—with the music alone, freed of the blemishes that time, place and circumstance inevitably inflict: the performer's grimaces and grunts (or his vocal obbligato), the lady's red hat two rows ahead, the coughing and candy-wrapper rattling, and the gentle whirl of the illicit tape recorder that hamper concentration in the concert hall are obviated. And, equally important to Gould, the

⁵ Harris Goldsmith, "Glenn Gould, An Appraisal," *High Fidelity*, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 54.

recording studio frees the performance of the burden of the miscalculations of tempo or dynamics, the flubbed passage-work, the memory slip, the inadequate instrument and the innumerable other demons that stalk the artist and make every rendering of a score insufficient to his musical ambitions. With the recording as go-between, both performer and listener encounter music with a greatly enhanced capacity for reaping the rewards of full concentration upon it, and arrive at an intimacy with the musical experience that was hitherto impossible.

That the performer can come closer to his ideal of the music he plays is in part the blessing of what Gould called "montage." In a detailed article for *High Fidelity*, he described its uses, taking as an example his 1965 recording of the A Minor Fugue, No. 20, from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. He had recorded it several times straight through, as was his wont, trying out several tempos, modes of articulation, phrasings and so forth. During playback, he narrowed his choice to two takes, neither completely satisfactory to him.

At this point someone noted that, despite the vast difference in character between the two takes, they were performed at almost identical tempo . . . and it was decided to turn this to advantage by creating one performance to consist alternately of Takes 6 and 8. . . . It was obvious that the somewhat overbearing posture of Take 6 was entirely suitable for the opening exposition as well as for the concluding statements of the fugue, while the more effervescent character of Take 8 was a welcome relief in the episodic modulations with which the center portion of the fugue is concerned. And so two rudimentary splices were made, one which jumps from Take 6 to Take 8 in bar 14 and another which at the return to A minor (I forget which measure, but you are invited to look for it) returns as well to Take 6. What had been achieved was a performance of this particular fugue far superior to anything that we could at the time have done in the studio. . . . By taking advantage of the post-taping afterthought, however, one can very often transcend the limitations that performance imposes upon the imagination.⁶

That is the Gould gospel in a nutshell. With these new capabilities opening up to performing artists, he asserted (perhaps more as propaganda than as prophecy) that the concert hall and opera house, beset as they were by other social and economic furies, would wither away by about the end of the century, completing the technological revolution. He called for support on a musician who at first blush might seem an unlikely ally: Leopold Stokowski. "He was, indeed, the first great musician to realize that the future of music would be inextricably bound up with technological pro-

⁶ Payzant, p. 39; quoted from Gould, "The Prospects of Recording," *High Fidelity*, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 49.

gress, and that the communications media were in fact the best friends that music ever had."⁷

Whatever one makes of this, and allowing for polemical excess in a good part of his pronouncements, there is no warrant at all in not taking his fundamental arguments at face value. And though he may occasionally have strayed into indefensible territory in pursuit of his technological gods, as with a notorious recording of Sibelius' piano music in which he saw to it that alternating sections of single movements were each imbued with a different quotient of studio reverberation, he never advocated that an acceptable musical result could be pieced together from tiny shards of recording tape. Though he would probably regard the point as superfluous, he was always capable—more than capable—of playing every piece he recorded straight through as if for a public performance, in a manner that would probably surpass most practicing pianists in technical command. As his CBS recording producers attest in a tribute to him in *High Fidelity*,⁸ he did not abuse the technological privileges of the studio, or use them to conceal executant weakness. He utilized the splice only to repair an occasional digital stumble and to accomplish the kind of musical elevation he described in the A Minor Fugue anecdote.

The objections to Gould's philosophy of recording come down to two: that the use of the splice to escape "the inexorable linearity of time" destroys the musical span, the intuitive thrust and continuity a performer imparts to a rendering in a single time and place; and that physical separation eradicates the stimulating "give and take" between artist and audience that, under the best circumstances, the concert hall fosters. To the first, his response was that the span of a continuous performance is part illusion and part the consequence of one episode or event following upon another, no matter what their precise nature, and so does not depend upon continuous execution for its creation. Furthermore, he asserted, it is virtually impossible, given the state of the recording art, to detect splices and thus to distinguish a performance recorded at one sitting from one that was not. In a typically ingenious challenge to detractors, he conducted an experiment in which he played eight recordings for eighteen listeners ranging from those who knew little about music to producers who had worked professionally with recording and editing tape. They were asked to identify splices in the pieces, two of which had none at all and one of which contained thirty-four. The highest "score" went to a listener who correctly located just seven of the total of sixty-six. Of particular significance is that the listeners "heard" a total of thirty-six splices in the two pieces that had none at all. Though Gould was vindicated, he did not entirely reject the notion that, as Payzant notes, "it is possible for performers to unify their performances under 'some inexorable forward thrust, some

⁷ Ibid., p. 34; from Gould: "Stokowski: A Portrait for Radio." CBC broadcast.

⁸ "Glenn Gould: A Retake Here, a Splice There, a Myth Everywhere," *High Fidelity*, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 55.

sustained animus, some ecstatic high.' "⁹ His counterclaim is only that such results are not the be-all and end-all of the performer's art, and that an equally satisfying kind of unity can be obtained at the editing console as well. It is rarely possible, in his view, for even the educated listener to detect by what means such unity was achieved.

"Ecstatic high," Gould's phrase in the preceding paragraph, sounds another note that runs through much of his discourse on music and performance. To the objection that recording eliminates the "give and take" of performer and audience, what some identify as a rapt community of concentration that can inhabit a concert hall, Gould proposes a new link between "ecstatic" states of performer and listener. Recording, which frees the artist to realize more closely an ideal of the music, likewise creates the conditions in which the listener may be transported by the music, freed as he is of the baggage of public performing domains. Such freedom permits the "creative listener" to arrive at fresh insights into the music, insights that "may return to nourish and inspire us" performers—a new kind of "give and take."

Though vouchsafed such glimpses of the technological promised land, some will hang back. Donal Henahan of the *New York Times*, a critic of broad sympathies (and a Gould admirer) with a bent for reflecting cogently—and wittily—upon any number of musical issues, put it this way.

What made Glenn Gould perpetually interesting to me was the possibility that, like Horowitz and others who have occasionally drifted off into retirement, he would eventually return. . . . Nearly a quarter of a century has passed and I still have not heard Glenn Gould again. I own all his records and I often return to them to enjoy their exuberance and X-ray vision. I am able to accept them as legitimate reminders of the Gould whose playing once pinned me to the back of my seat in amazement. And yet I cannot rid myself of the knowledge that the product is ersatz, down to the last disk.¹⁰

But though he cannot join in, Henahan implicitly concedes the major point. Already the recording has transformed musical life in our culture, and seems likely to continue doing so with even more effect as it becomes the province of videotape in the next decade or so. That it will finally foreclose performers and audiences coming together in the old way I surely doubt. But its position is secure, and not as a pallid reflection of a more authentic kind of experience, or an ersatz product. Glenn Gould helped us identify and shed our prejudices, while he engraved a shelf of performances that compel the admiration of even the unconverted—a tall order he set himself and carried out with grace.

⁹ Payzant, p. 126.

¹⁰ Donal Henahan, "What Has Glenn Gould Left Us?," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1982.

VERNON YOUNG

Odd Couples Out

BY MIRACULOUS VISITATION, one may as well guess, Ingmar Bergman was enabled to produce that series of distinguished films between 1952 and 1963 by which he can hope, by a forgiving posterity, to be remembered: *The Naked Night*, *Smiles of a Summer Night*, *The Seventh Seal*, *The Face*, *The Virgin Spring* and *Winter Light*. If I am to judge from *Fanny and Alexander*, which Bergman has with flagrant immodesty trumpeted as his farewell to audiences he never gave a hang about, the visitation will not be repeated; the residual content of his mind today is smut, an unresolved hunger for the supernatural, nostalgia for a fatuous social order which in the same breath he disparages—and undying vindictiveness.

Bergman began his film career with a paranoid invention salvaged, partly through elaboration, by Alf Sjöberg who, from the sketch submitted by Bergman, put the Swedish cinema on the map in 1944 with the film known here as *Torment*. The germ of this movie was Bergman's fear that he would be flunked from his University exam; his revenge in advance was his creation of a tyrannical schoolmaster whom he nicknamed Caligula. (Sjöberg added a political implication by having the actor made up to resemble Himmler, chief of the Reichsführer SS.) Over the years, Bergman's compulsion to nourish every slight, every adverse criticism, grew into his by now familiar, never subdued, war against Father, who once punished him by locking him into a closet. We are at liberty to wonder if it ever happened and simply to credit Bergman with singular tenacity for inventing an image that gratified him and from the image to extrapolate one of his twin obsessions (the other being the fatality of the couple): the despotism of the Father and hence the fallibility of God. (If there has always been something shopworn about Bergman's conception it's because Dostoevsky got there first, with the most!)

In *Fanny and Alexander* he has promoted his father, who was pastor of a church in Stockholm, to a *Bishop-stepfather* in Uppsala, with sadomasochistic traits of Caligula-like proportion (he is alleged to have been responsible for the death of his first wife and two children). Further: Bergman has not simply invented a despot of greater prestige; he has contrived to have himself (i.e. the boy, Alexander) and his sister Fanny rescued from the clutches of this monster by a benevolent Jewish antique dealer! Soon after, the Bishop dies horribly, burned to death in a fire started by his inva-

lid aunt upsetting an oil lamp. I cannot explore the provenance of Isak Jacobi without asking too many questions which can't reasonably be answered. Here is a cluster of them. Why is a Jewish banker in 1907 treated by the Bishop and his household as if the Third Reich had already been established in Sweden? Why does Jakobi have miraculous powers attributed to him? And why does he have two sinister nephews, one of whom is patently homoerotic and claims to be Alexander's *alter ego*?

To remold the world closer to the heart's desire is a staple contribution of the Romantic in art. Bergman is here desperately converting the Sweden in which he grew up into a place more habitable by far: at the same time more evil, more Gothic, more opulent—more tedious, even! The result is another compilation—more diffuse than usual—of Bergman's hates and hang-ups, his suppressed sentimentality and his latent vulgarity (what manner of sensibility is it that exploits the breaking of wind and giggling sodomy?): an infirm compromise neither social inquest nor hallucination nor extravaganza.

Narcissus endures. The hero is a small boy with a magic lantern, superior to the entire Ekdahl tribe. Fanny is but a token sister, used to complement Alexander in twosome shots. (She is incidentally quite expressive!) At the opening, photographed in dewy closeup, the ten-year-old Alexander, alone in a mansion as spacious as the Metropolitan Museum, is calling in vain for his mother, his sister, his grandmother, the housekeeper, anyone. At the end, safe after averted threats of misfortune, he is being read to by Mother, all his to command now that the Bishop has been destroyed. The text she is reading to him is that of the only authentic father to whose authority Bergman has consented, August Strindberg. And the closing message, from Strindberg's most obscure effort, *A Dream Play*, is to the general effect that as everything is a part of everything else it doesn't much matter what you do or how you behave. Dreaming is the only guide.

This last straw (a desiccated essence of Swedenborg's philosophy) is not, by the way, in the published version of *Fanny and Alexander* (Pantheon Books, 1982), which in fact differs in many particulars from the film you see: to the film's advantage by the absence from it of several *longeurs*, to its detriment by comprising material which would have clarified mystifying gaps in continuity, notably the farewell-to-the-theater speech delivered by Gustav Adolph. Since Gustav is otherwise identified chiefly as a domestic lecher and the theater is represented only by a sentimental Christmas tableau and a grotesque rehearsal scene from *Hamlet*, the point of Jarl Kulle's valedictory (his postlewd?) is considerably blunted.

I was tempted to believe that the whole movie was composed from the fantasy of a child's mind, but there is no indication what-

ever in the full text edition that this could have been intended and there are too many incidents that don't fit such a scheme. If it had been as I hoped, it would have gone a long way to explain the whole catastrophe, but the film would be no less of a grind. I fear that the iceBergman supposed to be seven-eighths below the surface has melted—and become drivel.

Like Bergman, Ettore Scola has a taste for the dissonant couple (cf. *A Special Day* and *La Nuit de Varennes*) but resemblance goes no further. While *Passione D'Amore* involved me in a suspension of disbelief quite unwilling, by comparison with *Fanny and Alexander* it was a model of cinematic clarity. Somewhere in northern Italy (c. 1862), Giorgio, a handsome young cavalry officer, wildly (and clandestinely) in love with someone else's wife, is in his turn pursued implacably by Fosca, the ugly, half-demented cousin and ward of his commanding officer at a military garrison. Obligated to be tactful towards a relative of the Colonel, who seems bent on pushing him into Fosca's clammy embrace, Giorgio overplays his hand, and soon finds himself compromised by his gallantry; the wretched creature fastens herself to him like a leech. A program note written by Scola to appease feminists tries to explain that Fosca was a victim of the prevailing convention whereby only a beautiful woman was desirable; hence, her morally blackmailing strategy. This is nonsense. As depicted, Fosca is not merely plain or medium ugly, she is *infernally* ugly and, to boot, a raving neurotic given to staging what looked to me like epileptic fits. As the tale progresses, or deteriorates (depending on whether you're you or me), Giorgio, no doubt undermined by his repressed feelings of guilt for his illicit weekends with his innamorata, bit by bit convinces himself that he does indeed love the adhesive Fosca. The ensuing episodes clatter down like an avalanche.

Fosca, at the limits of sexual frustration, accuses the officer of taking advantage of her, whereupon the Colonel challenges Giorgio to a duel. He, poor cluck, consents, without giving Fosca the lie. On the night before the duel he makes love to this roach of a woman, lest he die on the morrow and she perish thereafter without having known the rough kiss of male blankets. Next, he kills his Colonel in the duel and instantly has a fit resembling those of Fosca! In the final sequence (all movies have one sequence too many), five years have passed; bereft of will but not of the inclination to retell his story (this time to a dwarf), Giorgio notes that Fosca had died a few weeks after the Colonel. Of the other woman he deserted for the sake of a loyalty not required of him, he tells not a word. If I seem to express a failure of confidence in the scenario I have retailed, it is either because I have never been able to tolerate the libretti of grand opera or because I am too decadent to appreciate conceptions of honor which, if I'm to believe the fiction adapted and directed by Scola, flourished in the garrisons of nineteenth-century Italy.

Summoning a burst of generosity, however, I must add that the

above synopsis does not wholly define Scola's movie. In every other particular, it is convincing and handsome. The background stuff is great: the daily garrison routine, the horseflesh, the drilling, the unfunny man-to-man jokes, the observance of protocol. And the intimate scenes are beautifully designed and photographed, so that only the characters in a scene, with a few highlighted objects, are focused upon; the rest is in darkness, like a Georges de la Tour painting. (But I suspect a more recent influence: *Heart of Glass*, made by Werner Herzog seven years ago.) On the periphery of it all is one of those world-weary, skeptical doctors, inherited from Chekhov and his predecessors. This one, played with mellow authority by Jean-Louis Trintignant, places a gold coin on the table every dinnertime. If the talk is of anything but horses and women, he will leave it there. After five years, he is still pocketing the coin.

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the same text, which is to say, the same stranger
encountered each time as if for the first time.
And like a stranger, it was greeted with questions:
Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want?

Good questions to ask any poem when you encounter it. To answer them: these lines are from the opening stanza of "The Memorable" from Irving Feldman's latest—his seventh—collection of poetry.¹ Feldman observes that when the poem on the page became "the poem in the mind and in the mouth," the remembered poem spoke again, not as a stranger but as "a friend as close as one's own breath." The encounter was all-absorbing: "For the space of its speech, all other words / lay down in its voice and became its words." Even the interpreter of the poem has basked in its good feeling!

Happily, Feldman follows his own directives. His poems burst with their own well-being and make for delightful acquaintances: boys making beelines over bodies on Coney Island; a black woman—coatless, regal, and beautiful—shut out of her apartment on Christmas Eve by "some s. o. b."; or a talking dog, Rex, writing a fan letter to Philip Levine to have him give a poetry reading at the SPCA. Each poem surprises with a fresh subject, approach, and style. The poet can pour out two dozen lines without a pause in "The All-Stars" and "The Epiphanies," or he can shape brief reflective verse in "The Drowned Man" and zippy conversational patter with his son in "Talking to Fernando." Women are one favorite topic, and three of them are the "teacher, muse, and sibyl" of the title poem. At five, the poet's sister enlightens him on being himself: "Everything everywhere could be something known." As a teenager, he sees a girl staring at a bronze statue in a museum and she inspires him with his first knowledge of art. Lastly, he meets a crazed dishevelled woman on Fifth Avenue and, befriending her, learns about suffering and the limits of salvation. "A Crone's Tale" retells the Circe myth from her point of view, "an ordinary girl" with powers beyond her understanding and control. Feldman has come to terms with the feminine in his soul; he has made the dark stranger a friend; and, glad to share his discovery with others, he offers each poem as a gift.

¹ TEACH ME, DEAR SISTER, by Irving Feldman. Viking/Penguin. \$14.75; \$7.95.

"It's not me shouting at no one," Lawrence Joseph protests in his first volume of poems; "it's God / roaring inside me, afraid / to be alone."² The claim for divine inspiration may ring with a rhetorical exaggeration, except that the poems here possess such terror and intensity of experience that these concluding lines of the book sum up the whole impulse of the poetry. From the initial panorama of a burning Detroit in "Then," every line of verse places another brick in the wall of pain imprisoning this poet. He can run back and forth in time and from block to block of his city, but he is locked in its murderous and hate-filled streets. The poet recalls his Lebanese and Syrian Catholic grandparents, immigrants who fled to America to escape war and poverty and, ironically, encounter the same evils here in another form. The family store has been the scene of heroic kindnesses and blind assaults; his father and uncle have almost died there in robbery attacks. The son returns to grieve and to shout against the destructive waste of lives: "Now, in a car, on Van Dyke, / I cry for them and for me" ("Driving Again"). In "There Is a God Who Hates Us So Much," Joseph tells us: "I learned sadness from my mother's eyes," and "I learned blood from my father / fallen to a wooden floor, / a thief's bullet inside him." His father lived to warn him to forget. He concludes the poem with this statement for God to hear:

I was born in this city and live in this city
and know this city like no one else.
Who makes me eat my words and makes my eyes pain:
I measure you according to your creation.

Yet in another poem he wonders "Is It You?" who silences him and challenges him like Job. In "When You've Been Here Long Enough," Joseph admits that the city robs its people of the ability either to blame or to escape their anger:

Heaven answers your prayers with dust and you swallow it.
Alone, early morning, on the Wyoming Crosstown bus,

You feel the need to destroy, like everyone else,
as the doors open and no one comes in.

The "No One" of the title becomes a terrifyingly faceless Everyman who steps out of the dark alley in "Encounter" with the promise that he knows everything and will fill every want. This painful book offers reminders of what we choose to ignore and the poet cannot forget. Joseph's poems cut to the quick; they never dignify violence or try to explain it away. They gleam with the sharp edge of their truth; they are hard to forget.

² SHOUTING AT NO ONE, by Lawrence Joseph. University of Pittsburgh Press. \$12.95; \$5.95.

Far from Detroit is the small southern town James Applewhite grew up in. We never learn its name, but the poet renders a detailed verbal map of it in this his third collection of poems.³ The first section opens with the author looking back to the Atlantic shore from Somerset in England and ends with the flight that will take him abroad. This perspective of distance is sustained by the metaphor of a hawk's view of the landscape in "The Mortal Heroes" and several other poems. His father's Esso station, swimming in the river, sexual explorations behind the barn, riding the ferris wheel with a girlfriend—these moments and places emerge in various poetic encounters, some meditative and others action-packed. His father rescues him in "A Capsized Boat" and drives a gasoline truck out of danger in "The Lumber Mill Fire." The individual poems shape a story, unified in part by memories of particular times of year or day, as in "The Diamond in Shadow":

I was walking on the ball field one evening, and light
Getting gray. Suddenly, things didn't seem real.

In company with two friends, he felt as if he was in a fairy tale. He then enters into who he was once, surprised at the experience and confirming again the distant view on his own existence. The second part of the volume takes a wider perspective on the American scene, with its changes in values, culture, and media. The paved drive-ins replace the green fields; the luminous TV box, with "its tiny people, is less vivid / Than our cardboard Christmas armory with soldiers" ("View From a Tower"). Applewhite observes of his time of childhood:

My time is like the spectrum of a star:
The bands then were wider and colored,
Summerlawn came back again next year.

The title poem, "Foreseeing the Journey," employs the image of a fan which is like a propeller driving the plane or zeppelin of his memory: "I fly in this house and its history." The final trilogy of poems about a canoe trip with his son completes the allegory of the journey: the blades are now those of a paddle. The poet ends where he began ("Let me finish at the start") as the current carries him backward. Applewhite sometimes overstates his case with mouthfuls like "incorrigible imagination's pastoral," but he supports his vision with specific landmarks and incidents. Reading him we know who he is, where he comes from, what he wants.

³ FORESEEING THE JOURNEY, by James Applewhite. Louisiana State University Press. \$13.95; \$5.95.

Traveling is the theme of Constance Urdang's fourth collection of poetry.⁴ Victorian ladies setting out for far places, immigrants moving steadily westward—"not toward / But away from, not into the future, / But away from the past"—and travelers returning home to find things changed—"another way of discovering" that they are what has altered. Here again is the same stranger encountered as if for the first time, the familiar newly seen from another viewpoint. Absence may not make the heart grow fonder, but it does sharpen the mind. "The Luggage" declares:

Travel is a vanishing act
Only to those who are left behind.
What the traveler knows
Is that he accompanies himself,
Unwieldy baggage that can't be checked,
Stolen, or lost, or mistaken.

A century ago women tasted their "civilizing mission" by turning their backs on domesticity to show that "a woman could travel as easily as a man." Other themes, like childhood and nature, appear in this volume, but women and travel occupy the central spot. The tone is personal, but not autobiographical; the style is pre-set and the form fairly fixed, but the poems do not become repetitious. While there remains an underlying note of life's estrangements, a warmth of observation and concern kindles the poet's vision; the trees, birds, and children's cries are "carried away on the wind: / They are only the world. / It is enough." The final poem, "The World Is Full of Poets," celebrates poets near and far, under trees, on subways or streetcars. They are everywhere and, when the laurel wreaths and prizes are given out,

The line of poets will stretch from here to Brooklyn!
On days like this all the poets of the world
Might soar to the skies, arm in arm with one another
Like glorious brothers and sisters, to astonish
The world, with a single enormous hosanna.

On that happy day, poet Robert Sund certainly will be among the soaring. His second book of poems travels into the woods, mountains, farms, and towns of Washington's north country and records its people, animals, and seasons.⁵ Catching steelheads in the river with his brother, picking out a coffin for his father ("the cheapest" because he despised such pretenses), and plucking wild plums in the rain—these small events in accurately etched settings come alive for the reader. "Mean Dog on Country Road"

⁴ ONLY THE WORLD, by Constance Urdang. University of Pittsburgh Press. \$12.95; \$5.95.

⁵ ISH RIVER, by Robert Sund. North Point Press. \$7.50 p.

humorously pictures the poet warily avoiding a barking police dog named "Trouble." An excellent name, he reflects, one that literary spirits would approve. They might try to outdo one another with learned references:

I can't recall all the conversations,
but I believe you know them,
having perhaps been troubled yourself
on strange roads
that lead back to the city.

Should we recall that the name of Odysseus, the archetypal traveler, means "trouble"? Such touches add depth to Sund's landscapes, as when, walking back to camp at night along the Columbia River, he thinks of "anonymous Chinese poets, old poems on silk." The poet memorializes the frail encounters of a lifetime close to earth. In the poem "Centuries Go By," he reflects how few traces human beings leave in the world: "A blossom in men is / like a cathedral, / seldom built." Words written on a blackboard are erased, to "disappear forever." Some few are not forgotten, as the words of these poems should not be.

Lola Haskins notes in her fine first volume of verse that our journeys take us no further than ourselves.⁶ "We Take a Trip" imagines the track rolling up behind us and the grass overgrown when we arrive at our destination: "we will not be able / to say where we've been," nor would we be able to prove we had been anywhere at all! Friends declare they never missed us; spouses claim we were there at breakfast. We respond:

Yes, you must be right.
You must be right after all.
Remembering the long hours,
Remembering how we've changed.

In its five sections this book talks a lot about change. "Legends, Generations, Building, Looking Out, and Planting the Children" each trace the course of life. "The Idealist" from Part One sounds the note of paradox that runs through the poems: one speaker wants to prevent dogs from roaming freely in the neighborhood; the other says let them range the roads in packs. The second part contains vivid accounts of the flaming death of Fanny, Longfellow's wife, and of the poet's visit to her own dying mother in an impersonal hospital. Other poems describe the old country through a grandmother's eyes and offer a folk-song version of marriage. The third section, about building a house on a farm, in-

⁶ PLANTING THE CHILDREN, by *Lola Haskins*. University Presses of Florida. \$8.95.

cludes a heavy dose of carpentry terms. There are some weird poems in Part Four about Jeremy Bentham's skeleton which, in accordance to his will, is displayed in a glass case at University College and, on festive occasions, seated at a banquet table as guest of honor. Another recounts the acquisition by American medical schools of skeletons from India. The final part offers poems on the poet's two children, seen in reality and in dreams. The legendary at last encloses them, like the words of the poems; buried in this book, they yet spring to life like plants.

Frederick Feirstein, a psychotherapist and author of two previous volumes of poetry, has written a sequence of short poems about the birth of his son and the death of his father.⁷ Covering the cycle of a year, the poems serve as a journal of the poet's thoughts and feelings; through five parts the entries move from elation, anticipation of life, and grief, acceptance of death, to a more profound knowledge of fatherhood. In "Light," Feirstein admits that he agrees with his psychoanalytic books that say he has taken his father into his own psyche, yet he also believes the man in *The National Enquirer* who claims that, near death, he has been greeted by his father as guide. These poems are spare but filled with incident: dancing the baby to sleep, envying his wife, saying Kaddish, playing back the telephone tape machine in hopes of getting a message from father: "At the end: only silence."

The depth of Feirstein's losses, not all of which are recorded in these poems, may be gathered from "Thanksgiving," which recites a litany of sorrows: his sister's leukemia, father, uncle, and aunt dead, his mother's breakdown, and a cousin's suicide—all in six months time! The one detail that symbolizes the difference: the table leaves left in the closet. The poems become a testament to his own son, to whom the poet addresses "In the Middle of the 21st Century"; it describes the father coming home: "I lift you from the darkness / And rock you like a pendulum." The son tugs at his shirt and starts to stuff it in his baby mouth: "The sun blazes / And holds us like a photo in the moment." Referring to this poem, meant to be read "In the Middle of the 21st Century," the poet says "you hold this / As I once held you, / David." These unpretentious poems make their point, not without risking sentimentality, but they succeed in rendering the ordinary memorable.

Toi Derricotte has also written a journal-like poetry sequence about childbirth, but in approach and tone her work is worlds removed from Feirstein's.⁸ Words pour out in a flood of conscious feeling as this black woman, eager to have her baby in a natural way, faces "another world, ordered and white" in the hospital. Lines roll out in long, pure-flowing rhythm, as in this passage from

⁷ *FATHERING*, by Frederick Feirstein. Applewood Books. \$4.95 p.

⁸ *NATURAL BIRTH*, by Toi Derricotte. The Crossing Press. \$4.95 p.

“Maternity”:

suddenly the newness of the bed, the room, the quiet,
the hospital gown they put me in, the sheets rolled up
hard and starched and white and everything white except the
clock on the wall in red and black and the nurse’s back as
she moved out of the room without speaking, everything
conspired to make me feel afraid.

Just as this periodic sentence comes off with the right impact, so the poems rush ahead but never lose control of the drama. The moment of birth takes on the cadences of an Indian chant and then of Biblical prophecy. When the child emerges he is whacked and chopped at, held up—“my little fish, my blueness”—until he swallows in the air, turns pink, and wails. The baby comes as a stranger: “but i do not even know / this man.” The second part of the book, “Postpartum,” shifts from the first person to the third as the mother breastfeeds her son, talks to her husband about where they are to live, and leaves the hospital. The third part is a poem, “In Knowledge of Young Boys,” which addresses her son, remembering how he lived for her before he was born. With all its immediacy, it comes as a surprise to learn that this work has been written seventeen years after the blessed event! Derricotte creates remarkable tensions between the nurses and doctor and herself, between her ideals and her instincts, between her soul and her body. And at the end, we encounter a whole woman, one who joins in herself motherhood and self, past and present, memory and poetry. Rarely has birth been re-created so realistically and imaginatively.

In his fifteenth volume of poetry, Robert Penn Warren turns again to a book-length poem, as he did in *Brother to Dragons* and *Audubon: A Vision*.⁹ He here retells the story of Joseph, chief of the Nez Perce Indians, and his struggle to return to their homeland, Wallowa, in northeastern Oregon. In spite of several treaties and the pledge of President Grant to honor their rights, the peace-abiding Indians were forced to move to a reservation. At first they refused and attempted to negotiate, but their white flag was fired on. Joseph proved to be a genius of strategy and skirmishes, outwitting the Federal troops through his knowledge of the terrain. After a skillful retreat, he was obliged to surrender with winter approaching in 1877; then more Indians died in their camp imprisonment than had died in battle. Joseph and his band were at last moved to the high country but not allowed to return to Wallowa. Most of the central section of this nine-part poem describes the

⁹ CHIEF JOSEPH OF THE NEZ PERCE, by Robert Penn Warren. Random House. \$9.95; \$5.95.

battles and retreat of the Nimipu or "Real People" as they called themselves. The speaker is often Joseph himself or a narrator whose sympathy is with the Indians. The poet avoids the barbarous device of "injun-talk," although his tight-jawed style tends naturally in that direction:

The salmon leaps, and is the Sky-Chief's blessing.
The Sky-Power thus blessed the Nimipu
And blessed them, too, with
The camas root, good to the tongue, in abundance.

The poem is interspersed with quotations from contemporary sources, many favoring the Nez Perce, except for one nasty note by Charles Dickens. Warren establishes a steady narrative pace; he restores the landscape and the characters with verve; and, convincingly, he highlights the contrast between the ambiguous motives of the white leaders and the noble integrity of the Indian chief. He also emphasizes the irony of the defeated Joseph becoming a public celebrity while being denied the land sacred to his ancestors:

He is famous now. Great men have come
To shake his hand in his poverty.
Generals who chased him, ten to one,
With their fancy equipment, Gatling guns,
Artillery. Histories name him a genius.

The final section is set in the present with the poet flying out to visit the site of Joseph's surrender, with reflections on the lessons of these events, and with the hope that some may now look in their own heart: "To know." This admirable work touches the emotions and mind both in the tragedy it recalls and in the straightforward telling. It represents an honest effort to speak the truth about these crimes with the strength and sincerity inherent in poetry. It offers a belated tribute to the Nez Perce and attempts to right a terrible wrong which, of course, can never be undone.

Wallace Fowlie has written a curious work containing fifty poems about the characters and episodes of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.¹⁰ The poems, ranging from nine to sixteen lines (the usual is twelve), present vignettes that are dramatic and graphic, so succinct in fact that without knowing the novel the reader must find them unintelligible. But for anyone familiar with the original these distillations are delightful. When was Proust ever pithy and cryptic? These poems sum up whole passages, clarify intrigues within the plots, and convey the atmosphere of wit and artistry of the French masterpiece. They borrow

¹⁰ CHARACTERS FROM PROUST, by Wallace Fowlie. Louisiana State University Press. \$13.95; \$5.95.

heavily from the first chapters of *Du côté de chez Swann*, “Overture” and “Combray,” but they move on through the entire series with ease. Fowlie sticks closely to the original, paraphrasing or quoting from a paragraph or two, but sometimes reaches into a later chapter for a phrase to polish a poem. “The lady in pink,” for example, recounts Marcel’s visit to his Uncle Adolphe where he meets a woman his parents consider disreputable. So much is not said in the poem that the reader needs to check the novel to read between the lines for all the nuances Proust fashions from the encounter. The poem still stands on its own, even if it lacks the rich details of Proust’s narrative. Fowlie, whose last two books were commentaries on Proust and on Dante’s *Inferno*, cannot resist a Dantesque aside in the opening poem about Aunt Léonie, confined to her sickbed:

The damned in Dante’s Hell fell too
from Minos’ tail to beds of fire and ice,
and henceforth never moved beyond their pain.

The sequence nicely parallels Swann’s obsession with Odette and Marcel’s infatuation with Albertine, balancing memory and sensuous response. Proust’s use of paintings, artworks, and musical motifs interweaves with the imagery of gardens, salons, and country houses. Particularly incisive are the portraits of Françoise, the pregnant maid described as “Giotto’s Charity,” Grandmother, and the Duchess, who invites Swann to tour Sicily: “Dear Charles, give me / one reason why you can’t. I want you there!” Swann’s reply: “By then, dear friend, next spring, I will be dead.” Against all odds, Fowlie has provided a poetic reader’s guide and translation of quintessential Proust. One wonders what it would be like to read a version in French—a treat like having Mamma read aloud a new novel of George Sand?

Translations offer strange encounters with familiar works. Robert Fagles gives us a new rendering of Sophocles’ three Theban plays, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*—in the order in which they were written (they cover some forty years) and not as a trilogy or cycle.¹¹ From Yeats onward there have been numerous strong translations of some or all these plays; Fagles’ has the virtues of poetic naturalness and accuracy, and the power that comes with these two qualities. For example, when Jocasta tells Oedipus at the crucial moment in his quest for a human solution to the divine enigma of his guilt that he need not worry about oracles, Fagles writes: “So much for prophecy. It’s neither here nor there. / From this day on, I wouldn’t look right or left.” The doomed man answers simply—almost as if it were an afterthought—“True, true.” The words seal his fate. Ironically, every

¹¹ THE THREE THEBAN PLAYS, by *Sophocles*. Trans. by *Robert Fagles*. Introductions and Notes by *Bernard Knox*. Viking. \$25.00.

move that he and his father Laius have taken to avoid fulfilling the prophecies has brought them closer to this moment. In the ode that follows, even the chorus recognizes the blasphemy:

Pride breeds the tyrant
 violent pride, gorging, crammed to bursting
 with all that is overripe and rich with ruin—
 clawing up to the heights, headlong pride
 crashes down the abyss—sheer doom!

This translation catches the craggy beauty of the original poetry, which ricochets between quick repartee and explosive speeches and prayers. The climactic action of each play pours out in a relentless flow of words from a Messenger whose presence in the drama is only this: to “come to the marvel of it all,” the horror or the glory encountered purely through his poetry. Oedipus’ last words are not spoken by the actor himself, but by a character who appears to tell us what he saw and heard as the blind king disappeared into the forest at Colonus. The excitement of these narrations comes across in Fagles’ translation: “. . . moving away we turned / in a moment, looked back, and Oedipus— / we couldn’t see the man—he was gone—nowhere!” Bernard Knox’s introductions and notes are also great aids in reading, both for the background information—theaters were huge and masks were naturalistic—and in textual comments—Oedipus’ name puns on the Greek verb *I know*, precisely the boast that the hero frequently makes and fails to see as his failing: he does not even know who his father and mother are. “Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day,” we would do well, as the Chorus suggests, to “look on Oedipus” and “count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.”

In his fourth book of poems, Laurence Lieberman creates his own psychodramas of confrontation and recognition in a style that is classically disciplined and yet openly modern.¹² His broken-lined free-verse forms lend themselves to flowing narration that builds at its own pace to acute insights into our relation with earth, the past, and one another. In his title poem, Lieberman begins by describing the scene of a massive kite-flying contest in the Dominican Republic; the different kites become mythic monsters of an adventure-trip through the sky. One young contestant fashions a Punch and Judy bout between two puppet-kites; later, three brothers put on a risqué burlesque show with three shapely “living dolls” performing behind a soaring folding fan. The poet’s lines become a kite tugging and dancing skillfully in a suspended state: will he lose control? will the poem plummet to earth? No problem. Like the movie mimes, the tile-fitters, the musicians, woodcarvers, shoemsmiths, spelunkers, and other makers that flash

¹² EROS AT THE WORLD KITE PAGEANT: Poems 1979–82, by Laurence Lieberman. Macmillan. \$15.75.

through his poetry, Lieberman masters his craft by identifying himself with it. In "The Tilemaker's Hill Fresco," he re-creates the daylong labor of a tilesmith and his assistant as they replace the roof of a hilltop temple. The act of seeing is the progress of the poem, ordering its images of "the seen world as a flux / of intersecting cones, rotating cylinders, pyramids, cubes / and spheres." The artisan imposes pattern and color on the whole scene: "A mathematics that endures (oh, steadfast cosmos!), / and survives—like inner light—." In "The Grave Rubbings," the poet's children also draw out from the rock the design waiting to be transcribed: the tombstone art comes alive in "story-pictures of local sights." The poems move from Japan to Jamaica, from the cubist vision of Cézanne to the exotic abstracts of Jackson Pollock. The final poem, "Ode to the Runaway Caves," takes us underground for a tour of a prehistoric, subconscious world of darkness, lakes, and wall-paintings. Blind bats, huge salamanders, eels, crayfish, and even a stray buzzard confront the awestruck hikers in this strange cavern, where the guide boasts only of his friendship with Sean Connery from filming the cave-lake scenes for *Dr. No*. Primitive mystery surrounds us but we see nothing of its presence. Lieberman rejects no path to the unseen, however; photography and film offer an additional way of seeing space-time for the traveler. Hand in hand, the poet leads the reader on his highly personal, deeply felt quest into the steep mesas and lush landscapes which he has observed, absorbed, and articulated.

Arthur Gregor, in his eighth book of poems, is another passionate seeker after "the pattern of Being."¹³ Silence represents the essence (both scent and substance) of flowers, light, or love; words become the form of the quest for the inexpressible: Gregor holds the unseen and yearns to keep it held, or to remain within its grip, for as long as possible. He finds himself more open to the mystical experience in Europe than in America, yet since it is as an outsider that he knows the inner past of Europe's cathedrals and towns, he is fated always to come away from the experiences he encounters there. In "To Be Part of" he says that "to be in the things around you / as much as the things you love / are in you" is to know that "you are where you are meant to be / are as you are meant to be / in this human climate." At Chartres or St. Benoit he is moved beyond himself to see the "sheen" (a key word for him) in the stone. "The Sheen, or, Farewell to Vence" addresses this luminosity itself, the radiance in things; and yet the poet realizes that he depends on visibility to perceive the "you" he cherishes. He admits in "Markings": "The constant vanishings you have / are not the permanence you crave." Another form of reaching the inward self is through childhood: "The child you are is your truth" ("Clear Thoughts"). The long, ambitious title poem is partly an effort to touch and to be touched by completeness in the places

¹³ EMBODIMENT and Other Poems, by Arthur Gregor. The Sheep Meadow Press. \$14.95; \$7.95.

and incidents of earlier life. Gregor often returns to the image of the face that lies behind all the faces he has met. The vision must be in the body if it is to be felt, but it must transcend the individual if it is to fulfill human longing. "A Week in Vence" offers a series of poems that reflect on the flower—lotus-like—as the center of reality, and reaches a Zen-inspired climax in the essence of the flower, revealed "only then when its opposites that / are never reconciled but can / be cancelled out, are cancelled out." In addition to these provoking new poems, Gregor includes in this volume thirty-five selected poems from 1947 to 1974. They give the reader valuable insights into the poet's growing self-awareness and increased power of language. As he absorbs more of the ineffable, the imagery and style achieve a greater simplicity that enlarges and comforts as he comes closer to what he cannot reach.

Andrew Waterman is just as intent on discovering "some glints of those elusive / harmonies" in his fourth collection of poetry.¹⁴ The title poem is a sequence of 178 sonnet-like stanzas that follow the rhyme-scheme of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. The work begins at night on a beach in Northern Ireland where the poet reflects on his boyhood in England and the jobs and education that have brought him to Derry as a university teacher. He goes on to review the conflict between Protestant and Catholic, and the unwanted British military presence in the North. Next, he returns to Manchester, England, for a study-leave, and the rest of the sequence recounts conversations in bars, recollections of the Irish landscape, a visit back to Ulster, a christening, involvement with friends and lovers, and a climactic trip to a cavern "deep in the peaks of Derbyshire." In the cave he finds that things in his past come together to illuminate him with a vision "admitting only gratitude / for what has been." This autobiographical opus makes for compelling reading; its unpredictable restlessness keeps the narrative moving; the harshness of its attitudes toward political violence, academic vapidty, and current greed and ignorance is tempered by sympathy for people caught up in battles and in dreams of success. Waterman knows who he is and where he comes from, and he spells it out clearly in the course fashioned by his poetry: "And the poetic inspiration / is moral too in making us / feel other lives." We feel those lives, the waste and loss, "terrified all's now past redemption," yet we agree with the poet: "Despite all, hope's imperatives / impel us on. Till something gives." Other poems in this book convey the same forceful desire to put the moral issue in concrete concerns, to make the private world reflect the larger one in all its complexity, ambiguity, and frailty, and to speak with an ordinary voice about the extraordinary muddle of modern life.

A. R. Ammons looks no further than his own backyard to find the same undoing and unbeing of existence. In two new books of

¹⁴ OUT FOR THE ELEMENTS, by Andrew Waterman. Humanities Press-Carcanet New Press. £3.95 p.

poems—his seventeenth and eighteenth—he continues to probe nature for a pattern that will enable him and his readers to relate to what we encounter and what encounters us “out there” in weather, seasons, and things.¹⁵ His image of the sphere is a familiar one, but at the center he reminds us that we discover only emptiness, “nothing / more than a bit of / nothing.” The poet comes as close as possible to the point where he will vanish into whatever elemental Will or Way mysteriously works its pattern and purpose through all. “The Scour,” from *Worldly Hopes*, offers a microcosm of the Ammons vision:

It was so windy
last night the snow
got down nowhere
except against something.

The poet gives resistance by speaking up: ideally he too should give way to the wind and finally acquire the silence of snow. Like the hermit lark, he may reach a spot so remote that in hiding he will “find deeper / shyness yet: be what you must and will be: / I listen and look to found your like in me.” *Lake Effect Country* states the myth even more explicitly, in such poems as “I Could Not Be Here At All,” “The Spiral Rag,” “Debris,” “We, We Ourselves,” and “The Only Way Around Is Through,” which begins:

I’ve lost my ambition to be somebody:
what is there to be except
free of the need to be somebody:

The poet admits that trying to “write free of writing keeps me / writing,” so that he may achieve the silence beyond. The infinite, in “Zero and Then Some,” may be the “least spectacular thing around, the / immediate’s most trifling ingredient.” The task, then, is to give substance and clarity to what filters through brain and blood, to hold on to permanence in transience, and to trace shape in shapelessness, emptiness in flux. Ammons succeeds in defining what he wants: “sense of place complex / enough to represent reality / and simple enough / to be profoundly clear” (“Negative Pluses”). By his “shapely assertion,” the poem ceases to be the stranger, the voice of the wind, and becomes our own breath and the beating of our own heart. All true encounters with nature and one another are Self-encounters: “you are as if nothing, and / where you are least knowable I celebrate you most” (“Singling & Doubling Together”). It is “your great high otherness” that takes on and gives shape to our seeing and knowing all the way through to our coming encounter with death, “changed into your / singing nature when I need sing my nature nevermore.”

¹⁵ WORLDLY HOPES, by A. R. Ammons. Norton. \$15.50; \$5.95. LAKE EFFECT COUNTRY, by A. R. Ammons. Norton. \$15.50; \$5.95.

DEAN FLOWER

James Merrill's Voices

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED to something like a séance. Twilight would be the best time to arrive in, shall we say, Stonington rather than Athens? Find the "old eyesore" on Water Street, mount the stairway of surprise, locate the parlor with its "limber, leotarded, blue-eyed bats" in rug and wallpaper. You will notice how a great mirror of the Gilded Age gives back by candlelight the expectant set: milk-glass table-top, pencil, paper, dimestore version of a willowware cup, sheet of cardboard with the alphabet hand-lettered in an arc, "YES" and "NO" in the upper corners, Arabic numerals across the bottom, and a central ampersand. Let there be no mystery about the name: in French and German the *oui-ja* says "yes." Enter your hosts to demonstrate. James Merrill, the distinguished poet, places the fingertips of his left hand on the cup, leaving his right hand free to write; he is designated JM, "the Scribe." David Jackson, a novelist and the poet's close companion for over thirty years, places the fingertips of his right hand on the inverted cup, which promptly begins to glide under their mutual touch from letter to letter on the board. DJ is designated "the Hand." Now comes the strange part. The letters indicated by the cup form words and sentences: "AM I IN YR ROOM SO ARE ALL YR DEAD WHO HAVE NOT GONE INTO OTHER BODIES IT IS EASY TO CALL THEM BRING THEM AS FIRES WITHIN SIGHT OF EACH OTHER ON HILLS U & YR GUESTS THESE TIMES WE SPEAK ARE WITHIN SIGHT OF & ALL CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER DEAD OR ALIVE"

Merrill and Jackson have been in touch with—or have been inventing, depending on your point of view—this spirit world since 1955. With the publication of "The Book of Ephraim" in *Divine Comedies* (1976), Merrill began using some of the material generated at the Ouija board directly in his poetry, flung at his readers in the banner headlines of all caps, as if the *Daily News* were announcing apocalypse or doom. *Mirabell's Books of Number* (1978) and *Scripts for the Pageant* (1980) continued the bizarre narrative, as ever-more-elaborate Ouija transcriptions came to dominate the text. The three volumes are now published together, with a coda of thirteen new poems called "The Higher Keys," under the title *The Changing Light at Sandover*.¹ As JM remarks in the poem,

¹ THE CHANGING LIGHT AT SANDOVER: Including the whole of *The Book of Ephraim*, *Mirabell's Books of Number*, *Scripts for the Pageant* and a new coda, *The Higher Keys*, by *James Merrill*. Atheneum. \$25.00; \$12.95.

"What to call it, though?" The difficulty lies not in affixing a title but in naming what it essentially is: an epic or opera, prophetic book or spiritual autobiography? It is fictive, certainly, but not fiction, not "made up" in any familiar sense. Merrill tells in *Ephraim* of his first attempt to put it all into a novel, removing the experience from what was really happening at the Ouija board. That failed. Merrill chose instead to make it a verse narrative within another verse narrative: what the astonishing spirits said, intertwined with the reactions of DJ and JM and the running commentary of their ordinary lives. In effect Merrill asked his readers not just to listen in on the parlous goings-on at the Ouija board, but to experience it as he and Jackson did. We may disbelieve if we like, or think it all crazy; but for DJ and JM, "even the most fragmentary message— / Twice as entertaining, twice as wise / As either of its mediums—enthralled them."

Interviewers of Merrill have repeatedly wondered about the "reality" of these messages. Nobody wants to believe that the "spirits" heard through the implausible-sounding device of the Ouija board—isn't that a parlor game?—have any reality external to the minds of their transcribers. Merrill himself does not pretend he can answer this question. To J. D. McClatchy he said, "If the spirits aren't external, how astonishing the mediums become! Victor Hugo said of *his* voices that they were like his own mental powers multiplied by five." To Helen Vendler, who asked how real it all seemed to him, Merrill said, "Literally, not very—except in recurrent euphoric hours when it's altogether too beautiful not to be true. Imaginatively real? I would hope so, but in all modesty, for the imagination in question kept assuming proportions broader and grander than mine." A skeptical old dictionary of mine says the Ouija was once believed to speak "independently of the volition of the person or persons touching it, but [is] generally explained by unconscious muscular exertion." Clearly that will not do (how can unconscious twitches sound like W. H. Auden or know all about DNA?), but neither will unquestioning belief. Merrill has protested that he "climbed the walls to escape this sort of material":

Von and Torro in their Star Trek capes,
Atlantis, UFOs, God's chosen apes . . .
Nobody can transfigure junk like that.

Still, if these narratives are not sci-fi parlor games, they strain our powers of belief mightily. Voices speak from the dead—parents, beloved friends, famous writers, great figures of history (Plato, Nefertiti) and myth (Mercury, the Nine Muses); bat-like presences emerge with stories of centaurs, winged men, Atlantis, floating worlds, earth's pre-history, parables of the atom and Adam's fall; "God Biology" speaks, and so does his twin, "Nature/Chaos/Psy-

che"; and most of *Scripts for the Pageant* is comprised of lessons delivered by Michael, the archangel of light, Gabriel, the archangel of fire and death, and their brother deities of earth and water, all this interspersed with commentaries by a whole panel of additional tutors, including Gautama, Jesus, Mohammed, and Gertrude Stein. Surely, you say, these figments must come only from the minds of DJ and JM; perhaps the Ouija board unlocks forbidden or inhibited recesses of their minds; perhaps the things "said" by seeming-spirits are simply psychic metaphors that a diligent therapist could decode. Merrill readily grants some truth to this sort of possibility. In *Ephraim* he tells the story of going to an analyst who gets him to explain "these odd / Inseminations of psycho-roulette": they are a way to deal with guilt, as, homosexual and childless, he has failed his parents. But such rationalization falls ludicrously short of explaining both the art of the "readouts" (as DJ has called them)—their eloquence, intensity, beauty, and grandeur—and their decisive otherness. These are not just spirits talking, but gods. Their words seem not to mirror back Merrill's own mind, but rather to achieve their identities as he relinquishes his own. Whether such gods can be called internal or external does not, finally, matter very much. "The point remained," Merrill decided, "to be always of two minds." The three-part structure of *Scripts* echoes this principle: "Yes," "&," "No." Indeed, one of the final lessons is not to accept what the voices say, but to resist.

Despite its length—560 pages, about 15,000 lines—the trilogy has a single theme, stated simply at the beginning: "The incarnation and withdrawal / Of a god." The phrase (Northrop Frye's) refers at once to the discoveries made at the Ouija board and to an even larger, moral theme: the necessity of recognizing that our powers are not our own. If there are gods in us, we express them, not they us. Much of the poem is given over to evocation of the exalted and abysmal mysteries of the creation. We learn in *Mirabell* of the all-important "No Accident clause": everything happens according to powers we do not control, whether in the bio-physical realm or the timeless realm of the spirits. We cannot really think or talk about anything without personifying it and using metaphors, nor can non-human spirits communicate with us in any form other than our own vocabularies; but this does not mean that we can know the creation, much less control it, nor does it mean that we have created God in our own image or invented the powers who use our "word banks." (Merrill's voices frequently label their messages with a warning "M" for metaphor, in parentheses.) Evil, in the vast scheme of things, has no existence: the elements conflict, interact, create, and destroy; but the proper antonym of innocence is knowledge or experience, not guilt. Appropriately at the end *Ephraim*, the "familiar spirit" whose prismatic identity has flashed throughout the trilogy, undergoes an Ovidian metamorphosis into "Mr E," mystery. Mother Earth

and Father Time, a marriage once "on the rocks" in Merrill's earlier view ("The Broken Home," 1966) are now awesomely beyond complaint, revered in wonder, for their son and heir no longer dwells in the House of Pain. Again and again Merrill's visions and revisions of never-quite-authoritative communications from on high remind me of Emerson: "Subtle rhymes, with ruin rife, / Murmur in the house of life . . ." No less "music-drunken" and wary of the limits of all human powers than Emerson, Merrill yet seems more blessed. He has more to celebrate, perhaps: his dead can reassuringly be summoned. But both poets refuse to see evil as an ultimate reality or sin and punishment as having anything to do with God.

Merrill has spoken in an interview about his trilogy as if it were essentially didactic: "For me the talk and the tone—along with the elements of the plot—are the candy coating. The pill itself is another matter. The reader who can't swallow it has my full sympathy." He refers here, I think, to the moral seriousness of what Mirabell and Michael (principally) have to say about our miraculous but vulnerable "greenhouse," the earth, and about the processes ("V work") by which souls are strengthened and instructed. The central argument of the poem goes something like this: since we are all connected with each other "dead or alive" and heaven is simply "the surround of the living," a realm no less accessible and real than that of mortal existence, then we must recognize that gods—sublime powers—speak in and through us, and that by accepting their higher authority in the design of existence, we may hope to save ourselves and each other. Now that sort of message will probably stick in the craws of many readers. And if we add that the argument comes not from James Merrill but from the messengers of God, via the Ouija board, still more readers will gag.

Merrill's grand theme, however, isn't the pill he said it was. While paraphrase makes it seem solemn and didactic, with the author cast in the role of Ancient Mariner buttonholing us wedding guests, the poetry itself works otherwise. In the first place, Merrill is a superb narrator. Like the boy kidnapped in "Days of 1935" who entertains his captor with stories he hardly knew he knew, Merrill seems to be telling stories now as if his life depended on it. He has evolved a wonderfully supple conversational manner, open to the slightest verbal associations, ready to transform the most casual material with metaphor, willing to try the most unexpected rhymes, yet retaining all his old precision and syntactic guile. Here he is at his most relaxed:

Oh very well, then. Let us broach the matter
Of the new wallpaper in Stonington.
Readers in small towns will know the world
Of interest rippling out from such a topic,
Know by their own case that "small town" is

Largely a state of mind, a medium
 Wherein suspended, microscopic figments
 —Boredom, malice, curiosity—
 Catch a steadily more revealing light.
 (Mirabell, O)

So begins *Mirabell*, where microscopic figments will appear as if from the wallpaper and catch indeed a steadily more revealing light. How easily we move from “small town” to “largely a state,” and from a “world of interest” to figments “microscopic.” The effect is of easy-going honesty together with perfect control. Here is another gossipy bit:

I'd rather skip this part, but courage—
 What we dream up must be lived down, I think.
 I went to my ex-shrink
 With the whole story, right through the miscarriage
 Of plans for Joselito. He . . .
 (Ephraim, I)

In that breezy fashion begins a series of fifteen stanzas, all rhymed *abba*, all measured into the same sequence of four-, five-, three-, and five-stress lines. It would take a book to catalogue all the forms—couplets, tercets, quatrains, sonnets, villanelles, syllabics—that Merrill uses and improvises upon in the lengthy course of this *poésie-fleuve*. Even more remarkable than the quantity of this artifice, however, is the fact that its effect is seldom formality. The jesting, chatty, self-deflating, off-the-cuff narration runs steadily throughout the poem, quietly holding it together. Colloquialisms repeatedly undercut any notion we may begin to form that the author might be showing off. Form thus comes to seem the armature of the experience, an underlying structure more happened upon than sought. Section R of *Ephraim* is composed of five sonnets, rhymed *abcd abcd efg efg*; but if any stanza is singled out, no pattern seems apparent:

Revise—or let it stand? Here I'm divided.
 Wrong things in the right light are fair, assuming
 We seize them in some holy flash past words,
 Beyond their consequences and their causes.

Merrill loves to write as if he had not revised, as if his vision had indeed come “in some holy flash past words.” No doubt it did, but when we examine the words, we discover something analogous to the voices dictating from the Ouija board: nothing is accidental. We are about to learn that language has its own versions of the DNA molecule, and that the words of poets are less original than anybody thinks.

Language is not only the chief glory of Merrill's trilogy but its

thematic crux as well. Consider the spoonerism “SWIRLS BEFORE PINE.” It appears early in *Ephraim*, a cliché turned into an aptly Japanese image on a kimono. DJ and JM are in Osaka, about to learn of the death of the poet’s father. Spoonerisms can be silly verbal fun, and this one seems to come from Ephraim since it’s given in all caps. Moments later Ephraim will say, equally playfully, “MY DEARS I AM BEST SUITED WHEN U STRIP.” The poet and his “familiar spirit” obviously share a love of puns, wordplay, double-meanings, and linguistic jokes. But wait: shortly before the end of *Mirabell*, some two-hundred pages later, “in strolls Robert Morse, / Closest of summer friends in Stonington.” Morse proves to be a kindred spirit for DJ and JM, not just because he’s a pianist and occasional poet but because he’s an inveterate manipulator of words. Reading the *Mirabell* typescript, he says, has “taxed / My venerable beads”; he calls their glassed-in room “a surly temple”; studying chemistry at college, he “put the heart / Before the course.” We learn that Auden anthologized something written by Morse in *A Certain World* under “Spoonerisms” (fact). Now jump ahead to the middle of *Scripts*: Robert Morse has just died, and JM prepares to write his elegy when RM’s spirit appears at the board, despondent at first—“AH WELL / R(E)MORSE IS USELESS & HAS EVER BEEN”—but soon up to his old jokes. “PYTHAGORAS,” he says, “CLEAVES ME OLD.” Two conclusions are possible from this broad synthesis: first, that RM is the real author of SWIRLS BEFORE PINE, and we were simply unable to recognize his voice then; and second, that whatever identity we assign to the phrase (JM’s, RM’s, or Ephraim’s), the real author may just as well be the kindred spirit all three of them share.

Merrill has long been a poet willing to take risks with his language. Having gained early a reputation for elegance and subtlety, he refused to stay in a decorous niche. In the well-known conclusion of “The Broken Home” Merrill risked an outrageous pun, transforming a dog into the sinking sun: both “red setters.” Puns are never random accidents for Merrill; frequently they dramatize Proustian convergences, with memory magically linking up disparate experiences. Punning in the trilogy is more often a hint of other voices at play behind the conscious one:

The lapse that tides us over, hither, yon;
The tide that laps us home away from home.

Or:

Flagstad herself had no such notes as these
Of lashing hail and rapturous farewell.

Or, at the very end:

Friends are letting me
Compose myself in tactful privacy.

Merrill is never so engaging as when he listens this way to the interesting "accidents" of his own language. Ever alert to metaphor (like the "flame" colored paper which seems—foreshadowing Ephraim—"a witty shade"), he keeps discovering more than was consciously intended, more than he alone could have conceived. Unlike Joyce and Nabokov, who revel in the same sort of duplicity, Merrill does not seem to want credit for his artifice. He has observed, "There's always a lurking air of pastiche which, consciously or unconsciously, gets into your diction. That doesn't bother me . . . No voice is as individual as the poet would like to think."

Nowhere is this idea dramatized more effectively than in *Mirabell*, Book 9. JM has just confessed his longing, after writing *Ephraim*, to return to his own life and words, but "Here I go again, a vehicle / In this cosmic carpool." The voice of Auden rebukes him, at length. "Doing your own thing" is an anal delusion, he says; it's time now to grow up. "THINK WHAT A MINOR / PART THE SELF PLAYS IN A WORK OF ART." It is a privilege to have dwelt in the great manor house and gardens of English prose:

FROM ANTHOLOGIZED
PERENNIALS TO HERB GARDEN OF CLICHES
FROM LATIN-LABELED HYBRIDS TO THE FAWN
4 LETTER FUNGI THAT ENRICH THE LAWN,
IS NOT ARCADIA TO DWELL AMONG
GREENWOOD PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOTHER TONGUE
ROOTSYSTEMS UNDERFOOT WHILE OVERHEAD
THE SUN GOD SANG & SHADES OF MEANING SPREAD
& FAR SNOWCAPPED ABSTRACTIONS GLITTERED NEAR
OR FAIRLY MELTED INTO ATMOSPHERE?

On what basis, Merrill seems to be asking, do we seek so much credit for our own words? Is it so implausible to admit that spirits, forces, powers not of our own wills control our minds and words? And could we prove that they do not? (I would like at this juncture to acknowledge the assistance in the first two paragraphs of this review of Emerson, Twain, Nabokov, Eliot, DJ and JM, and Emily Dickinson.)

Merrill began *Ephraim* shortly after the death of his beloved Athenian friend, Maria Mitsotáki. In the course of his long autobiographical excursion, DJ's parents die, JM's father dies, George Cotzias (another Greek friend) dies, and Robert Morse dies. The deaths of Auden and Wallace Stevens occurred after the poet began using the Ouija board but before *Ephraim*. By the time the three volumes were finished, Maria Callas, Vladimir Nabokov, and Robert Lowell had died. The voices of all these dead, plus many others, are heard again at the Ouija board, some of them disori-

ented a bit, but all conspicuously free from lamentation. As Peter Sacks has written, the trilogy "does confront pain and sorrow, the death of friends and parents, the extinction of cultures, even the threat of global ruin," but it rejects despair. With an assist from Wallace Stevens, Sacks argues that Merrill "has become our greatest poet of serious and far-reaching solace, a poet whose inspired defense against a dark view of mortality and fate burns brightly, 'the way good solace seethes.'"² Amongst many instances of this profound truth, let me cite the very last poem of the coda, "The Ballroom at Sandover." JM is about to come full circle; having finished writing his Divine Comedies, he is about to read them to a ghostly gathering of his predecessors, the friends and admired writers whose spirits he transmits. He recognizes in the setting the locus of so much conflict in his life and work: "Here at the heart of structure, and alone / Surviving now to tell me where I am: / In the old ballroom of the Broken Home." There is no grievance, however: house and home are in his work, unbroken. He writes for an august audience, all those who have created him, the parents of his work. Rather charmingly T. S. Eliot steps up to offer reassurance: "THESE WORKS, YOU UNDERSTAND? THAT OTHERS 'WRITE'. . . / ARE YET ONE'S OWN." But JM still feels just a shade used by all these bidden guests. Now they make their peremptory demand: "NOW POET, READ!" and JM obeys. The poem is the solace he and they need, perhaps they more than he. His words provide a mirror "beyond whose depthless dazzle" they now see. "And for *their* ears I begin."

To anyone who has read the trilogy, Merrill's six earlier books of poetry will never be the same.³ They now seem full of ghostly intimations. No mirror mentioned but it will suggest those propped near the Ouija board to let the spirits see. No fire screen or "Charles On Fire" without a sense that Gabriel has put it in the script. "The Peacock" and "Transfigured Bird" from *First Poems* (1951) must surely be adumbrations of Mirabell, who was transformed from bat to peacock twenty-eight years later. And "Hourglass" seems the first dim stab at Sandover and the hourglass design of yes-and-no. If many of these poems now look a bit undernourished, overqualified, more than a little cautious and elusive, and sometimes excessively restrained, that is only because the trilogy represents such a quantum leap in Merrill's expressive range. What caused the change can only be guessed. That somewhere in the lyric poet there was a storyteller has been evident, not just from Merrill's two novels but from the frequency of such balladlike tales as "The Summer People" and "Days of 1935." Play-

² Peter Sacks, "The Divine Translation: Elegiac Aspects of *The Changing Light at Sandover*," in *James Merrill: Essays in Criticism*, ed. David Lehman and Charles Berger (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 159.

³ FROM THE FIRST NINE: Poems 1946–1976, by James Merrill. Atheneum. \$20.00; \$10.95.

writing, Merrill once remarked, left him "on fresh terms with language. I didn't always have to speak in my own voice." When we add to this the years of transcription from the Ouija board, which gave Merrill innumerable voices not his own, it begins to seem likely that Merrill's chief problem in becoming a better poet was his single voice. The startling innovations of the trilogy allowed him to express multiple identities. He chose a persona opposite to the commonest American kind, the Whitmanian majority-of-one Inexorable Self (Lowell, Mailer, Berryman, Bellow, Roethke). He chose instead to seek a "self-effacing balance":

Already I take up
 Less emotional space than a snowdrop.
 My father in his last illness complained
 of the effect of medication on
 His real self—today Bluebeard, tomorrow
 Babbitt. Young chameleon, I used to
 Ask how on earth one got sufficiently
 Imbued with otherness. And now I see.
(Ephraim, Y)

In escaping his own ego, Merrill found a way to join the world. His fantasy of being kidnapped into the family of gun-moll Jean and tough-guy Floyd could now in a sense come true. So could his Proustian "*désir de mener la vie de tout le monde*." What had to come first was a surrender of individuality. If the self is not to become a prison, the gods seem to have told JM, the assumption of personal uniqueness has to be surrendered. When he did that, all blessings flowed. Merrill learned that he, no less than others with more strident voices, was a child of his time, and of all times.

The best argument of all for Merrill's elaborate and exhausting forays into the spirit world lies in the way they bring us back to this one. Perhaps the moment where this is done with the quietest tenderness and beauty comes at the conclusion of *Mirabell*. The whole passage is surely one of the sublime moments of our literature. I quote only its closing lines, where Merrill brings everything together:

What at this late date
 Can be done with the quaint idiom that slips
 From nowhere to my tongue—or from the parchment
 Of some old scribe of the apocalypse—
 But render *it* as the long rendering to
 Light of this very light stored by our cells
 These past five million years, these past five minutes
 Here by the window, taking in through panes
 Still bleary from the hurricane a gull's
 Ascending aureole of decibels,

As numberless four-pointed brilliancies
 Upon the Sound's mild silver grid come, go?
 The message hardly needs decoding, so
 Sheer the text, so innocent and fleet
 These overlapping pandemonia:
 Birdlife, leafplay, rockface, waterglow
 Lending us their being, till the given
 Moment comes to render what we owe.

JEFFERSON HUNTER

The Servant of Three Mistresses

A CHARACTER IN MARGARET DRABBLE'S *The Middle Ground*, misquoting a scrap of Wordsworth someone once sent him in a love letter, says that he wasted hours searching for the source among "the love poets," Donne, Robert Graves, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "Love poets"? The label sounds dismissive and quaint, like "bellettrist" applied to a critic or "farceur" to a playwright. Love poets would seem disqualified from those high aesthetic tasks (purifying the language of the tribe, teaching the free man how to praise, making it new, finding ideas of order at Key West, and so forth) much valued in our time; love poets wind up in half-remembered private letters, not dissertations or anthologies.

Drabble's Ted might simply be mistaken. No doubt he is mistaken about Donne. But about Robert Graves he is right. The poems of a literary career stretching from before the Great War to 1975 have been devotionally placed, one by one, on an altar to the Beloved, or Woman, or the Muse, or the White Goddess: the titles change, as do the features of the individual women about whom Graves is writing, but the essential subject of the poems remains man's subjection to woman in love, the serenities and pains accruing from that subjection, and the betrayals lovers inevitably commit as they move apart from each other to new devotions. Sometimes the love theme assumes an anthropological grandeur (pretentiousness, his detractors would say) as Graves makes man into Man, woman into the triple-faced moon-goddess—nymph, consort, and crone—adding such mythological quasi-evidence (long misunderstood but now re-interpreted icons, zodiacal signs,

cult rituals, etymologies, Irish-Welsh-Greek-Egyptian parallels, rescued texts) as he has always had in plentiful supply. Sometimes the theme is understated, the buried source of poems rather than the doctrine which poems expound, as in the deeply moved and moving series of poems written to his second wife in the forties ("Despite and Still," "To Sleep," "Through Nightmare," "Mid-winter Waking"), or the early quatrain "Love without Hope," surely the best four-line poem ever written:

Love without hope, as when the young bird-catcher
Swept off his tall hat to the Squire's own daughter,
So let the imprisoned larks escape and fly
Singing about her head, as she rode by.

Occasionally the theme is displaced by comic or satiric interests. But what remains in Graves's work when such digressions are removed (literally, often enough, what is allowed to remain in the successive issues of the *Collected Poems* as Graves works over his previous volumes) is the love theme itself, treasured, simplified and elaborated, burnished, shining with reflected moonlight. He is a love poet.

The oddity about all this is that Graves might more easily have become a different kind of writer. A War poet of the Sassoon-Owen-Rosenberg stamp, to begin with, but perhaps the psychological wounds went too deep for that. For years after 1918 Graves dreamt of shelling and the trenches, and he could not turn the War to literary account until *Goodbye to All That* in 1929. The chronicler of Claudius and Milton's first wife might have become the definitive versifier of history. He looked through books for the eccentric and problematical as obsessively as he rooted through the antiques shops of Palma and London for snuffboxes, cameos, *objets*, and the like—the portable property of bygone times. But for the most part Graves reserved his re-creations of the past for novels, the "potboilers" meant to buy time to be a poet. Graves might have written more about his travels, instead of remaining imaginatively bound to Mallorca, the blessed isles of matriarchal myth; he might have written about death and loss, as so many poets have been forced to do in this century—he might, for example, have produced an elegy for his son David, killed in action in the Far East in 1943. There is no such poem. There is on the other hand the famous "To Juan at the Winter Solstice," an advice-to-my-son poem wrapped around a tribute to the Virgin's silver beauty and an exposition of the Triple Will. Above all, this famously combative and reckless critic (his short list of "anti-poets" includes Virgil, Milton, Wordsworth, Pound, Auden, Yeats), this restless improver of books (*David Copperfield*, the *Iliad*, the Gospels, the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam), might have been the great poetic satirist of his generation. It is probably not a coincidence

that he took great pleasure in a 1937 gift of a bow and arrows, and quickly developed a surprising accuracy. Graves liked nothing better than hitting targets, but did his intellectual archery in prose, chiefly in lectures or casual journalism. No one who has read Graves on Yevtushenko and Russian-American nightingales (see *Poetic Craft and Principle*) will ever take that facile poseur seriously again.

All the versifying roads not taken are irrelevant to admirers of Graves's actual poetry. Even admirers, however, must have questions about how Graves picked and stuck to his one road. Martin Seymour-Smith's *Robert Graves: His Life and Work*¹ relates the disasters and triumphs of Graves's amorous career in such telling and usually frank detail that answers begin to emerge. After the War the wounded young officer needed a wife to help make the nightmares go away. Graves chose Nancy Nicholson, of whom Seymour-Smith is highly critical, and indeed it seems that few women in Britain could ultimately have been less sympathetic to Graves, as poet or husband. Just before the Second World War, with his emotional life again in tatters and his affairs in disarray, Graves needed help again, and this time he fell in love with Beryl Hodges, the estranged wife of his collaborator Alan Hodges (*The Long Weekend*). Seymour-Smith is devoted to Beryl Graves (as she eventually became), for the stability she provided the poet and for the information she supplied to the poet's biographer.

In between these two women, in the decade of the thirties, comes the far more problematical figure of Laura Riding, poet, domestic tyrant, intellectual busybody, reviser of Graves's (and other men's) work. Seymour-Smith, it seems to me, is neither critical of nor devoted to Riding, but admirably detached, though rather sorrowfully in awe of her powers over Graves. On one page he will catalogue Riding's petty exactions, her white-goddess-like insistence on being deferred to: once, while staying in France, Graves had to reject some written introductions to local people because the introductions put Graves's name first, Riding's second. Rewritten in the proper order, woman-man, Muse-poet, they became acceptable. On another page Seymour-Smith will note how much Riding's suggestions helped Graves's work; she was a perceptive reader, though not a good writer of prose (here, Graves helped her). Riding was essential to Graves because she was definite, fixed, even doctrinaire. Her certainty was "impressive," he commented in a letter: "When I raised objections she was ready for me." For a man with Graves's fears, emotional shifts, and half-felt agonies of guilt (in old age he announced more than once that he had murdered a lot of men), certainty about poetic aims and devotions was worth giving up much for. And give up much he did.

¹ ROBERT GRAVES: *His Life and Work*, by Martin Seymour-Smith. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. \$22.50.

Full of pretense, pathetically impractical, physically unaffectionate (she and Graves were lovers in the technical sense only briefly, then spent ten years in a more "spiritual" union), Riding made the poet's life narrow as well as focused.

Robert Graves: His Life and Work is, then, impartially informative about Riding and equitable in the treatment of other figures in Graves's life. It handles its sources efficiently and discreetly throughout. By the criterion of "A Plea to Boys and Girls"—"And call the man a liar who says I wrote / All that I wrote in love, for love of art"—Seymour-Smith is truthful; on the first page of his introduction he calls his subject the "foremost English-language love-poet of this century." One cannot imagine anyone better placed than Seymour-Smith to write this life: he has had a long correspondence with Graves and worked with him for extended periods on Mallorca.

An "essential" book, in other words, in the somewhat Pickwickian sense that reviewers use that word—a book readers of Graves's poetry will have to read, if only to discover the changing human lineaments in the face of the White Goddess. A pity, therefore, that the book rambles on a little too long, a little too digressively. Seymour-Smith tends to preach about Things in General ("Such lip service [paid to literature] is worse than straightforward condemnation. It is the very antithesis of what literature is about"), is awkward with transitions and even pronoun references, drops an occasional needless cryptogram into the text (what were the connections between Riding's brief affair with Allen Tate and her later attachment to a Deyan child, Francisca? why must we wait twenty pages for the explanation of Ava Gardner and "The Portrait"?). He has too much to say about peripheral characters (two paragraphs on Beryl Hodges' father?), not enough to say about some important Gravesian actions (did T. E. Lawrence, Arnold Bennett, John Buchan, and Herbert Asquith really help Graves to get his teaching post in Cairo, as he claimed?).

Maybe it is a good sign that a biography leaves you with questions. The devil's advice to storytellers, according to Graves, is to leave "Motive and end and moral in the air": "Nice contradiction between fact and fact / Will make the whole read human and exact." Martin Seymour-Smith may or may not accept diabolical advice, but he has certainly written about a man full of contradictions, loving and unloving, intelligent and gullible, enslaved and independent, and made that man's life "human and exact."

WENDY LESSER

Intelligent Preferences

THE GREAT DANGER OF COLLECTING ONE'S ESSAYS is that they will seem out of context in book form—that, losing their original occasion, they will lose their importance. This is not a problem for Elizabeth Hardwick, either in *Bartleby in Manhattan*¹ or in her two previous books of essays. For Hardwick is not an "occasional" essayist, in any sense of the term.

I mean this as both praise and criticism. In a positive sense, Elizabeth Hardwick's writing rises above the demands of journalism: it is never merely topical, it reflects no pressures of impending deadlines. Her drama reviews are not reviews, but thoughtful, deliberate pieces which draw on her vast knowledge of literature and art. Her book reviews, while they may appear at the moment of a book's publication, have none of the chatty, easily-dispensing-with qualities of the standard review; rather, they are long looks at the life of an author, the sum of his total output, or the historical situation in which he wrote. Her cultural essays—on Martin Luther King's funeral, on the Selma march—have none of the "I am here" impetuosity of on-the-spot reporting, but instead convey a much more distanced, contemplative view, often couched in the grammar of neutrality or invisibility. And her literary criticism is intentionally timeless, an essay on Melville or Hardy being at once very much about *this* time and about the time of the work's origin.

The title essay on "Bartleby the Scrivener," for instance, seems even better now than when I first read it in *The New York Review of Books*—and that is saying a great deal. Like much of Hardwick's writing about literature, this is really no more than a "reading" (a heading which she in fact uses to label this whole section of the book). But such a reading makes one wish for more "appreciation" and less "analysis" from the critical world at large. This is not mere plot summary, but the sifting of a wonderful story through a wonderfully perceptive reader's mind. And what perceptions! Examining Bartleby's oft-repeated phrase, "I would prefer not to," Hardwick remarks that "Bartleby's 'I' is of such a completeness that it does not require support. He possesses his 'I' as if it were a visible part of the body, the way ordinary men possess a thumb." This realization, so central to the work, gives rise to others of equal strength. Faced with an exchange between Bartleby and his employ-

¹ BARTLEBY IN MANHATTAN and Other Essays, by Elizabeth Hardwick. Random House. \$15.95.

er ("What are you doing here, Bartleby?" "Sitting upon the banister"), Hardwick is able to interpret: "The lawyer had meant to ask what will you do with your life, where will you go, and not, where is your body at this moment. But with Bartleby body and statement are one." These ideas may seem simple—certainly their language is simple enough—but their very simplicity is perhaps what has made them inaccessible to most critics, who fear the obvious. It takes a writer who understands the complexities of "the simple truth" (the title Hardwick has given to one of her novels) to make such observations.

Yet Hardwick does not limit herself to abstract truths: Bartleby lives now as well as then, "in Manhattan" as well as in literature. Describing the lawyer's "therapeutic wish" to solve Bartleby's problem, his frantic suggestions about bartending and bill-collecting as alternative careers, she says: "He begins to think of new occupations for Bartleby and it is so like the frenzied and loving moments in family life: would the pudgy, homely daughter like to comb her hair, neaten up a bit, and apply for a position as a model?" This is Hardwick's sharp wit, muted and transmuted for purposes of sympathy: she is fond of this somewhat laughable lawyer who takes on the role of social worker or therapist, who "keeps going on and on in his old democratic consecrated endurance." He is the soul of liberalism faced with Manhattan, the ameliorative tendency confronting Bartleby's "resistance to amelioration."

Elsewhere Hardwick's wit cuts more sharply—aims at its victim and strikes the telling (if ladylike) blow. For those who have heard her speak in public, it is even possible to sense the softly Southern "Who, little ol' me?" intonation that infuses and sharpens her most devastating insults. These are usually saved for fellow practitioners of her literary crafts. Take, for instance, her comment on critic Peter Conrad's "swift execution of W. H. Auden": "Poems are evidence and he investigates them in the sense that a handwriting expert investigates a ransom note." Or her remark about the drama critics reviewing a Herbert Blau production of Buchner's *Danton's Death*:

Many men of the press go to the classics all nude and fresh and seem to greet each play as if it were written yesterday on Central Park West. Many considered the banality of the evening to be equally shared by Blau and Buchner and one had the idea they were sending the heroic young genius, who died in 1837, back to some play-writing class at The New School. One reviewer remarked that it would help to know something about the French Revolution, but he did not explain what it was that held the knowledge at bay.

There is something in this tone that recalls Randall Jarrell at his wittiest. And yet Jarrell would have gone all out for the laugh,

would not have held his wit "at bay," as Hardwick seems to do. We do not laugh at Hardwick's wittiest remarks—we squirm, as if we too might just as easily have been their object, had the aim been slightly different. The attack is less pointed, more diffused than Jarrell's, and as such hits a wider target.

Diffusion, combined with or caused by a kind of authorial elusiveness, is a trademark of Hardwick's essays. Indeed, if an essay is "a fairly brief piece of nonfiction that tries to make a point in an interesting way" (as a popular college-level handbook would have it), then Elizabeth Hardwick's pieces do not really fall into the genre. "A point" is too narrow a description for what her essays come to: they meander, and remark, and drop their most telling comments under their breath, as it were. In this fashion, they become essays on much larger topics than their purported subjects. Thus Hardwick's article on Nabokov's book of lectures actually becomes a discussion of the pitfalls of teaching when she says of Nabokov's interpretations: "A novel becomes a fairy tale so that it will not be thought to be a sociological study or a bit of the author's psychohistory, two ideas he may rightly have believed to be running like a low-grade fever among the student body." A digression in her essay on "Militant Nudes" is even more telling and even more (seemingly) irrelevant. Commenting on *Ice*, Robert Kramer's movie about revolution, Hardwick says:

The actors look like Columbia or Hunter students, but not teen-agers by any means. They might well remind you of people about to get their licenses to teach in the New York City public school system since they have about them an oppressive and oppressed look, an air of dissatisfaction coupled with dedication, a feeling for work that is necessary, directed toward the welfare of the person and the community but which is, revolution and school alike, somewhat unappetizing.

What begins as an apparently casual metaphor ultimately becomes linked—emotionally and causally—with the thing it describes, so that the educational system comes to seem both the root and the symbol of the "youth revolution" of the sixties.

This essay and several others in this book ("The Oswald Family," "The Charms of Goodness," "The Apotheosis of Martin Luther King") are among the best things written about the sixties in America. Again, this victory is achieved through evasive action: by focusing on a single incident or film or book, Hardwick is able to use it as the springboard for remarkably telling observations about the whole society. But when she attempts to address the larger concerns directly—as she does in "Domestic Manners"—the effect is much less powerful. That essay has a few good asides about what distinguished the sixties from the seventies, but it is burdened by the kind of sociological portentousness that always afflicts essays of this

sort. It is not that Hardwick cannot generalize beautifully, given the right topic: her essay "Boston," from the earlier collection *A View of My Own*, is a wonderful piece of cultural criticism. But "the sixties" is simply too vague a subject to be dealt with effectively in her inimitably vague style.

For such an elusive writer, Hardwick is surprisingly acute about at least one extremely concrete topic: the body. In my earlier quotations from the *Bartleby* essay, and in her remarks on the drama reviewers going "all nude and fresh" to the classics, one can see the way she uses the body as both a metaphor and a physical entity. Moreover, she is well able to estimate the importance—and sometimes the over-importance—of the body to other writers as well, and this awareness gives rise to some of her most accurate assessments. Reviewing Isherwood's *A Single Man*, for instance, she praises the earlier novels and then comments: "As time went on, the spirit seemed to tire a little. Compulsion, isolation defined his mood. The body had become a terrible enemy. *A Single Man* begins and ends with brute biology." And in her 1950s essay on Simone de Beauvoir (collected in *A View of My Own*), she snipes:

The Second Sex begins with biological material showing that in nature there are not always two sexes and reproduction may take place asexually. I have noticed in the past that many books strongly presenting feminine claims begin in this manner, as if under a compulsion to veil the whole idea of sexual differentiation with a buzzing, watery mist of insect habits and unicellular forms of life. This is dramaturgy, meant to put one, after a heavy meal, in a receptive frame of mind.

Mocking the effort to disguise human physicality under a "mist" of biology, she actively reverts to the physical body in her metaphor of a heavy meal—another one of those Hardwick remarks that tells all in a digression.

Occasionally, of course, this allusive, elusive technique can get irritating. At times one simply wants Hardwick to finish her sentences—to fill out the suggestions she so tantalizingly lets fall. For instance, she writes of Grotowski's theater (in an otherwise excellent essay): "It is death and transfiguration, historical memory, transformation (Christ-Apollo)." But that little parenthetical remark just won't do; one can't simply drop "Christ-Apollo" into the conversation and then abandon it as if it were a completed idea. Yet the same technique serves her well in other circumstances, as when she describes the mundane, deadening effect of a Simone Weil biography and then adds parenthetically: "(Sylvia Plath is another example of reduction by expansion—high school, tennis lessons, dates.)" That three-member list summarizes exactly what is so disappointing about the collection of Plath's letters home: the extraordinary individual has been made ordinary.

This musing, note-taking tone, conveying the impression that Hardwick is talking mainly to herself, is what is best and worst about her writing. It is what allows her to range so widely across ideas, to bring in relevant background, to make crucial asides. It is also what gives her essays their special impersonal quality: these are not assertive arguments launched by an individual opinion-maker, but diffuse, open observations about the world. And this quality, in turn, is what has made it possible for Hardwick to move freely and skillfully from essays to fiction and back, without the hampering "personality" that destroys most essay-writers' novels.

But it is also what made me remark, at the beginning of this article, that to say Hardwick's essays are not "occasional" is a criticism of sorts. With about a quarter of the essays in the present collection, I found myself wondering what had motivated their writing. They were not called into being purely or largely by immediate events, and they had therefore not lost their topicality; it was just that they seemed never to have had it. "Timon of Paris," for instance, is a strange piece of theater criticism about a French *Timon of Athens* in which Hardwick never discusses (and barely alludes to) the issue of translating Shakespeare into French. One has the sense, reading this essay, of being at a dance film which focuses on the dancers' faces: the camera is too frequently looking in the wrong direction.

By standard journalistic rules, Hardwick's essays are often looking in the wrong direction—but therein lie their originality and their power of revelation. Only occasionally does this technique wear on me, and it is usually on those occasions when I would simply have preferred not to look at what Hardwick wants to examine. Perhaps this is why Elizabeth Hardwick is so good on *Bartleby*: for her, as for him, the crucial choices are all the result of an irreducible "preference" rather than a concerted act of will.



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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Some August Fiction

COULD IT BE that academic people with their glorious three-and-a-half months every summer fret more about its transience than those who do real work for a living? For years I have kept around two talismans to trot out at the appropriate summer-times and run them around the course once more. The first is from late in *The Bostonians*, and flowers out of Olive Chancellor's desperate musings, here given great beauty by James's style:

There were certain afternoons in August, long, beautiful and terrible, when one felt that the summer was rounding its curve, and the rustle of the full-leaved trees in the slanting golden light, in the breeze that ought to be delicious, seemed the voice of the coming autumn, of the warnings and dangers of life . . .

The second, also desperate, if in a different tone, is something a colleague once said to me as I attempted (then a young teacher) to do my own work, one now-distant June: "Don't forget, Pritchard: after July 4th the summer is shot in the ass."

That one set me back a morning or so. Now, years later, writing out of a shot August, I have, thanks to the cagey planning of Houghton-Mifflin, been reading *August*.¹ As I pushed along gamely, understanding every word, every feeling, I engaged in minor self-laceration: Why was I not reading Proust? Wasn't it about time for a long session with Wordsworth, read chronologically? Was I ever going to face up to Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*? But here was Judith Rossner's efficiently told entertainment that I wished I could have been more entertained by. Rave-reviewing it in the *Times Book Review*, Walter Kendrick admitted that probably someone who had been through or was in analysis would find it richer than one not so qualified. Unqualified, I tried to find the analytic exchanges absorbing, like this typical one in which the patient, Dawn, is going on about her dream life:

"You see, there really is something to be frightened of, isn't there. I used to have a whole village and now all I have is a chair . . . or a crib . . . or both."

There was a momentous stillness in the room so that sudden-

¹ AUGUST, by Judith Rossner. Houghton-Mifflin. \$15.95.

ly the hum of the air conditioner was audible in a way that one didn't normally notice.

"A crib and a chair," the doctor said . . .

Plastered on to the "stillness" here and trying hard to get by so as to create a scene, Rossner's "momentous" falls with a thud. She is happiest when sticking to dialogue, which she employs well to convey the banality (or, should one say, everyday truth) of the analytic hour. And she convinces us that, indeed, an analyst can deeply need her patient, not just in August. But in writing about her characters, she too often falls into the easiest novelese, while her excursions into contemporary sickness fads have the heavy ring of knowingness:

The anorectic disorders were the twentieth century's abortion on demand for a large number of young women to whom sex (or abortion) was no more optional than three meals a day had once been, but whose time between fucking was dominated by anxiety over what they'd last eaten, fear about which craving would next overtake them, and concern over how they would avoid gaining weight when they had (inevitably) binged on it.

We are invited to understand this as a summary of the ideas which arise out of conversation between doctor Lulu and her analyst-lover Charles. But who really is speaking here, moving so expertly from the twentieth century to "fucking" without batting an eyelash? And toward what understanding of the whole matter is the reader being directed? Like her analyst-heroine, Rossner seems satisfied with the therapeutic way of talking, never conceiving that a novelist could aspire to, and perhaps command, a more august (if not Jamesian) perspective. So the novel jazzes along, all too smoothly, never resisting the intelligence almost successfully—as Stevens said poems should do. It is very properly a best seller, good for the beaches at the Hamptons where people, especially New York moms and dads with a spot of cash, can read about themselves and their daughters. But because it has no style, there is really no created inwardness in this book which purports to be about inner lives.

Ending, Hilma Wolitzer's first novel, chronicled a husband's illness and death from cancer. Seen and told through the eyes and voice of his wife, it was a brilliant example of taking an impossible subject and writing about it imaginatively, in a manner neither lugubrious nor saccharine. If nothing she has written since comes up to that first book, there is always much good observation about the texture of ordinary life, about parents and children, lovers and their difficulties, the look and feel of things on the highway or at the supermarket. In the new book, whose title refers to a home

for old people in Los Angeles where Daphne, the heroine, works, there is a good moment when Daphne—engaged in an affair with a married man—visits her parents in Seattle.² While there she goes out one night in the family car to visit an old high school friend:

When she's alone in the brown Plymouth wagon, the one they've had for nine years now, she's even more overwhelmed by nostalgia than she was in the house. She used to borrow the keys to this car while her father slept, and then sit in it, inside the garage, with her high-school boyfriend, Jesse Krantz. They didn't ever drive anywhere, she would argue against her conscience, against thoughts of her father's forbidding. They just stayed in the oily darkness to kiss and kiss and paw each other. Their moans were absorbed by the tan upholstery and mixed with the music from the radio, which they played with the ignition key turned halfway.

The novel is best for incidental pleasures like this one, or like the visit to the old friend which follows, then the coming back to a midnight conversation with her younger sister, now on the pill and doing it with more than one. "Sex is on the rampage," thinks the heroine, including herself in. Daphne's affair with Kenny is the heart of the book, although Wolitzer gives us a great deal about the patients in the Palomar Arms as well; and this latter roving narration, with its wide-screen treatment of character, seems to me not to work so well. Still, the novel is a good deal less claustrophobic and a good deal more fun than *August*; Hilma Wolitzer has a genuine sense of humor, whereas Judith Rossner doesn't get much beyond the occasional wise-gal remark. The ending of *In the Palomar Arms* is violent and comic, as things are restored to "normal." But we read Wolitzer less for her grand design than for the life which sometimes flourishes under her touch.

Ellen Schwamm, whose first novel, *Adjacent Lives*, was a critical success, has succeeded with her second one in writing a completely unironic book.³ The title gives it away, as do the opening sentences: "I love him in full knowledge now. I have loved him in various ways. I am convinced I loved him before we met. I am both comforted and shattered by this—and ashamed." What Henry James called "the terrible fluidity of self-revelation" here gets off to a running flow and continues to be deterred by nothing—no scruple, reticence, or momentary embarrassment—throughout its course. The jacket tells us that Ellen Schwamm is married to a novelist named Harold Brodkey; but the key man in the novel has no

² IN THE PALOMAR ARMS, by Hilma Wolitzer. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$14.95.

³ HOW HE SAVED HER, by Ellen Schwamm. Knopf. \$13.95.

first name, he is merely "Lautner" (although sometimes he's "The Devil"), and if you don't think "Lautner" knows how to handle a woman, well savor this:

He brought her to the bedroom without a word. Not even her name. He walked over to the bed and took off his clothes. She was apprehensive about the silence but happy too in her awe, a child watching a magician. His unclothed body seemed enormous, like an extent of meadow, and like a meadow he was covered with a golden furze across which there played a kind of ambulating shadow, and each hollow and crevice the shadow fell upon darkened still further while all the rest blazed gold as if in full sunlight. Who could have imagined a body like his?

Why, only Ellen Schwamm, she of the golden furze and ambulating shadow!

There is much other good stuff to read aloud to the company after drinks and dinner: "He was an ambitious lover. With each thrust he strove to empty her of her history. Her story . . ."; "He broke a second vial under her nose and she breathed the fumes greedily this time. Almost at once she felt herself pounded by a wild, foaming, liquidy thing . . ." But no, I must desist, before the censors get me. Not to be missed, clearly, and the funniest thing is that Knopf seems to be proud of the whole thing, with their "profound exploration of emotion" etc. on the blurb.

There's also a fair amount of terrible fluidity in the self-revelations of C. D. B. Bryan's hero, and most of it made me wince.⁴ Just how close to his author this fellow is may be gathered by noting that the novel is dedicated to "Monique," while the woman with whom the "I" narrator eventually throws in his lot is named Odette and has "a European woman's unwavering sense of what a man must be: strong, protective, caring, intensely loyal to his woman, whose well-being must be his primary concern." Both Mr. Bryan and his hero seem happy enough to make do with pop-therapy language—"caring," "role-playing," "relationships," "the games people play"—as if the savvy reader were able to take it as straight as the author and hero seem to. With a paragraph like the following on its second page, one grasps the stylistic level at which this novel operates:

Another time she [Odette] said I was more intent on being loved than I was on loving . . . I knew I had always been interested in the pursuit of beautiful women, yet I had difficulty making a real connection with a woman, and once I'd make a connection, staying that way. It also helps explain why I was never

⁴ BEAUTIFUL WOMEN; UGLY SCENES, by C. D. B. Bryan. Doubleday. \$16.95.

able to balance satisfactorily my yearnings for love, a home, children, sex, success—all those things other men want too. I wish I had a better idea what other men want, what they are like, and how I might be.

Clearly the poor fellow needs a Men's Support Group, does he not? Instead, through the flashbacks of the novel, we see him in various (rather juicy) sexual entanglements with the "beautiful women" of his title. And when Mr. Bryan says beautiful, he means beautiful: "Odette's body stretched beyond me, she was supporting herself on her elbows, her head was arched back, her breasts lifted up. Her taut dancer's body was coiled like a spring. She gave into me [sic?] with a mixture of shyness and abandon I had never encountered before; and I responded with a tenderness I was surprised to discover I still had within me." Thanks to Odette, he is even able to conquer his impotence, the sprightly rascal.

Clearly what all this lacks is the touch of satire. If you have, like Bryan's hero, a lot of trouble with beautiful women and somehow aren't sufficiently liberated to be "caring" instead of "macho" (nodding your head gravely about male sexism), then the novelist should put some jokes into the game and run his hero through his paces—as Kingsley Amis, for all his identification with Jake Richardson, runs him through his paces (in *Jake's Thing*). On the contrary, C. D. B. Bryan is all reverence a yard wide, for women, for his hero, for better relations between the sexes—all of which makes his book as dead as the language in which it is written. There are sharply observed social details, and some hottish sex, but it's essentially a book as earnest and awkward as its title.

After these swollen, sincere chronicles by Schwamm and Bryan, I was pleased to pick up a dark horse of a book by a writer new to me.⁵ In her account of the trials and tribulations of "Ann," from being married to horrible "Ben," to her separation and subsequent happiness with "Abraham" (with a baby at the end of it), Sherril Jaffe has entertainingly recreated Mary Hartman. *The Unexamined Wife* (a wonderful title!) is a funny sort of "novel," consisting of mostly short takes, with rather formal, square titles somewhat in the manner of Evan Connell's *Mrs. Bridge*. Chapters, often consisting of a couple of paragraphs, are titled things like "The Wife in a Box," or "The Useless Dishwasher," or "The Terrible Stereo," which last one begins this way: "Ann and Ben had a terrible stereo. It was very cheap . . . It played stacks of records indiscriminately, or its radio played loud enough from its corner (horrible to look at) to obliterate not only the birds and the bushes and the incredible silence, but also each member of the house from the other." More far-out and wispier than Evan Con-

⁵ THE UNEXAMINED WIFE, by Sherril Jaffe. Black Sparrow Press. \$14.00; \$8.50.

nell, Jaffe's writing can achieve some interesting effects, often parodic, as in the chapter "Going to See Ann and Ben" which begins in babytalk Dick-and-Jane manner: "Both Ann and Ben loved it when dear friends came to visit, for they could see through *their* eyes the starry skies and blue blue skies, the wonderful view—even the kitchen table where they always ate pie." (Putting those "dear friends" together in this rhyming way with eating pie is perfect.) In "A Poor Return," when Ann misses a volleyball and loses the game for their side, Ben, angered, slams the ball hard at her stomach, causing tears to spring to her eyes. Ann's reflection is, "Now they wouldn't be able to play volleyball anymore." From reading these glancing offbeat sentences of Sherril Jaffe's, I found out more about a bad marriage than from the earnest, lengthy efforts of Schwamm and Bryan. Jaffe is not at all designed for a wide popular audience, but she deserves to be read, and Black Sparrow has done its usual distinguished job of book-making.

While on the subject of Black Sparrow, please salute them, along with Penguin and Virago Books, for their noble work in reprinting out-of-print titles.⁶ Only the committed Wyndham Lewis reader's heart will leap up at now having available not only the stories from his collection, *The Wild Body*, but their "archeology" as well: earlier versions of them; maps and illustrative material supplied by the completely resourceful Bernard LaFourcade. But the book of his which any literary person should be sorry not to have read, and which is now made beautifully available in an especially handsome edition with all sorts of fringe benefits (selected illustrations from Lewis' art, reproductions of his notes and typescript, and a variant ending) is his late novel, *Self Condemned*. If there exists (and there does) the curious person, innocent of Lewis, who would like to begin somewhere, *Self Condemned* is a fine opportunity. Or one could go back to the beginning of his career and read *Tarr*, now available from Penguin with a self-portrait on the cover. Penguin has also, laudably, given us Ivy Compton-Burnett's last novel, *A God and His Gifts*, thus making it possible to introduce students to this distinctive writer whom they've never heard of (there are hundreds writing theses on Virginia Woolf, fully available in paperback). And in an even more laudable, because more extensive, presentation, Virago has published four novels by the underrated (partly because of the name?) Elizabeth Taylor, whose fine intelligence and wit pervade every page she wrote. Of these four titles, *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* is the

⁶ THE COMPLETE WILD BODY, by Wyndham Lewis. Black Sparrow Press. \$20.00; \$12.50. SELF CONDEMNED, by Wyndham Lewis. Black Sparrow Press. \$20.00; \$12.50. TARR, by Wyndham Lewis. Penguin. \$5.95p. A GOD AND HIS GIFTS, by Ivy Compton-Burnett. Penguin. \$3.75p. THE SLEEPING BEAUTY; MRS. PALFREY AT THE CLAREMONT; IN THE SUMMER SEASON; THE SOUL OF KINDNESS, by Elizabeth Taylor. Virago/Dial Press. \$6.75p each.

one to begin with if you want to see whether, or how much, you like Elizabeth Taylor. I can't imagine reading it and not wanting to go on to the others.

A year ago I taught a course in Modern Satiric Fiction and decided, for the first time, to include Iris Murdoch on the reading list. After much hesitation I chose *A Severed Head* for the book. Results were rather interesting: a fair number of the class (a large one) testified that they had been unable to put it down. For the first time that semester (having previously read, among others, Hemingway, Lewis, and Ford Madox Ford) they were spellbound by a writer. Some weren't sure whether that testified to Miss Murdoch's mastery as an artist or to their own readiness to be taken in by a gothic, sensational shocker—all those dark gods, a touch of incest, and Honor Klein's impressive wielding of a samurai sword. Now, twenty years and fifteen novels later, she has written a book almost three times as long and with three times as many characters, all of whom she devotes explanatory space to.⁷ There is our old Murdochian friend, the enchanter figure, here played by the philosopher John Robert Rozanov who comes to an imaginary English spa town called Ennistone and influences the lives of all sorts of people by setting many kinds of crazy situations and encounters in motion. We have heard it all before, perhaps all too often before, in her books.

Yet, as always with reading Iris Murdoch, there is much that is entertaining, things which—like the discussion of a Mallarmé poem between a homosexual priest and Rozanov's young female ward—would be beyond the abilities of most novelists. She has lost none of her ability to describe places and houses and the physics of things generally. But the human aspect of it all seems woefully absent, even as compared with *A Severed Head*, which in its focused concentration on the first-person narrator, Martin Lynch-Gibbon, had cumulative force even if it didn't go very deep. *The Philosopher's Pupil* has neither depth nor cumulative power; it diffuses itself rather, wandering among endlessly proliferating details. As just one instance of this, what does one do when, after 340 hefty pages have been traversed, we are taken on a picnic attended by the major characters at which the food and drink are described in detail—who brought what and what kind of Yugoslav Riesling or Double Gloucester cheese it was. All this information is presented in sentences which open in parallel manner: "The drinks before lunch had been as follows . . ." "The food at lunch had been as follows . . ." Why should we know these things, and why should they be enumerated to us by a faceless narrator who strives for no distinction of language in the rendering? The Murdoch operation, so hugely professional in one sense, is also (as the students now say) quite impossible to suspend disbelief in, and as the August days rolled by, with me still reading, troubled

⁷ THE PHILOSOPHER'S PUPIL, by Iris Murdoch. Viking. \$17.75.

thoughts surfaced about the worth of it all. What, other than finishing the novel, was the purpose of continuing? For all her intelligence as a critic and theorist of fiction, this writer seems quite passive and unthoughtful about the accumulation of words, of novels—increasingly automatic and self-propelled—that is her literary career. A very strange case indeed.

It's a long way from Iris Murdoch to the first-born novel of Caroline Thompson, a young American writer, but I think I'll probably remember *First Born*⁸ for a good deal longer than it takes me to forget *The Philosopher's Pupil*. The jacket pushes it as being in the tradition of *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Shining*, and indeed its story of the "haunting" (but that's not the word) of a mother by her aborted child has its affiliations with the going thing in fantasyland. I claim to be pretty much impervious to such shockers, especially when it's only words, no pictures, but found myself responding with a mixture of revulsion and sympathy to the narrator's account of her romance—it must be called that—with the maimed creature who is her first-born and who returns to assert his place in the nature, or un-nature, of things.

The account is delivered in first-person pages from the dead wife's diary, presumably discovered by a friend and "edited" for our edification. In the attempt to conceal the first-born (Joey), who has taken to hanging around the house, from her husband (Edward, one of those rat-fink husbands you love to hate) and also to take care of her "normal" son (Neddy), the possibilities for embarrassments are large. Thompson is very good at exploiting them, not least of all for comic purposes:

Tuesday, July 8, 1980

Joey often comes and gets in bed with me while Edward's still in the den watching TV or downstairs reading. He burrows against me and curls up in my arms. It's one of my favorite things. He runs back upstairs when he hears Edward go into the bathroom. But last night, I guess we both fell asleep. All of a sudden, Edward was climbing into his side of the bed and Joey was still there. I felt him wake up too, and stiffen. I didn't know what to do with him. I lifted him over the side and nudged him under the bed.

"What're you doing?" asked Edward.

I answered that I was getting rid of the book I'd been reading.

"Heavy book," Edward said.

There then follows some Edward-initiated sex, with Joey absorbing the brunt of the action. This scene is representative of how its writer keeps things moving by paying attention to nuance, embarrassments, the thought of what would happen if . . . something were to happen.

⁸ FIRST BORN, by Caroline Thompson. Coward-McCann. \$13.95.

Thompson's writing is sharp and clean throughout. She has a nice command of idiom and is very good on the details of play-groups and car-pools, doctors and emergency rooms. And she has a well-oiled, lurid imagination, trained on various cultural levels of schlock and sordidness. I could complain about the paraphernalia with which she has draped the tale, annotations by the "editor" which give us in needless detail just who "Barbara" was the mother of and to whom so-and-so was married; also some interpolations of "real" psychiatric case histories paralleling the fictional one. But these don't much detract from and may for some enhance the strong central narrative. It would be a pity if this book slips away as just another first effort, because it is in fact accomplished and absorbing, clearly the work of a lively new novelist.

Bernard MacLavery's *Cal*⁹—about a young man caught in the Troubles of Northern Ireland, complicitous in a murder for which he had no stomach, then falling in love with the murdered man's widow—can only come to an unhappy end. As short and trim as its title, the novel is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of place and completely at home in its conversational, narrative movement. It lives wholly within the realistic pale, in fact is so committed to a relatively tightlipped unfolding of things—Mr. MacLavery stays scrupulously detached from his story—that it was hard to assent to a final claim for the novel in Michael Gorra's excellent front-page piece in the *Times Book Review*. Gorra praised all the right things to be praised, including the book's atmosphere of "sad, expansive beauty," arising from the sense of precious moments of peace, domesticity, and work, stolen from the larger world of deadly conflict. In closing, the reviewer hesitated the prediction that the novel will be a text comparable to *A Passage to India*, inasmuch as both works dealt fully and imaginatively with an "intractable" political situation. What the comparison ignores, I think, is the relatively constricted nature of MacLavery's fiction when compared with Forster's. There is no equivalent in *Cal*, that is, of the expansive, risk-taking, speculative narrator, with his formulations, his moments of wisdom ("But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else") which Forster affords us, like them or not. I suspect that if *Cal* lacks anything, it is something like resonance, since its story is airtight and locked into itself; there's no way to get out, MacLavery having constructed a most impressive cage. And you could also say that—to use a less than systematic term—*Cal* isn't much fun; while *A Passage to India*, whatever else it may be, is surely that.

Nicholas Delbanco has written a number of novels which I've respected but never quite been gripped by—never had the unable-to-put-it-down feeling. His best book seemed to me his last one, *Group Portrait*, where he drew with great economy and selectivity a composite portrait of Edwardian novelists—Wells,

⁹ *CAL*, by Bernard MacLavery. George Braziller. \$12.95.

James, Conrad, Crane, and Ford—and managed to make it wholly entertaining. The new collection of stories,¹⁰ each of them about a sensitive, Jamesian, early-middle-aged American male on whom nothing is lost, reveals Mr. Delbanco in his most inward and lyric mood—not that he indulges in “poetic” prose, but he gives each story a rueful and elegiac air. Whatever is—job, children, parents, wife—is inadequate, because endangered, here today and therefore gone tomorrow. Knowing this truth, as it seems that he always has known it, the protagonist in each story keeps cool, holds himself together, *worries*—in good Madox Fordian ways. There is much cutting from one scene and one time to another, also a lot of living in past and future rather than in the present, the latter of which is, in the words of Frost’s poem, “Too crowding, too confusing— / Too present to imagine.”

Probably the type for all Delbanco’s men, looking for something and not quite finding it, or not finding what they expected or hoped to find, is the biographer in “Northiam Hall” who (it is a Jamesian tale) pursues the dead writer through the eyes of those who knew him and at the places where he lived. Instead of finding Daniel Emmett, the poet who died at twenty-nine, the biographer ends up confronting himself and finding that he is scarcely a biographer—that there is really no one to write about:

Martin raised the window. Outside, a light rain fell. He felt again, in the rented room, how much he was a trespasser. It had not been intentional. He had hoped to be a witness. But he had witnessed nothing pertinent, no scene that seemed to require him. The lamplight from his window illuminated air. Emmett’s teaching had been suicide; he was better left alone. We each must learn to die; exampling helps only a little.

As far as I can see, nothing in any of the stories contradicts or takes precedence over these rather gloomy though undeniable meditations. Indeed the title story—and the concluding one to the volume—is about the death of friends (it is dedicated to the memory of John Gardner, a friend of Delbanco’s) and the inability of life’s fine moments to stand up and count in the face of such inexorableness. As the story draws to its close, snapshots of their child’s birthday party, held a few days before, send the wife into tears:

He looked up to see her crying. “It’s awful,” Ann said. “It’s so awful.”

“Not everything.”

“It is.”

I don’t think Delbanco’s work here ever really kicks back against that depressed note. It is arrogant to say it, but I wish he would

¹⁰ ABOUT MY TABLE, by *Nicholas Delbanco*. William Morrow. \$11.95.

be a bit more Jamesian, as in James's great letter to Henry Adams about why art is *worth* it, even in the midst of ghastliness and destruction. Also arrogant no doubt to wish that the writer had a little more joy in him, yet I found myself wishing something like that for Delbanco as I read his extremely intelligent, extremely poised stories.

As for Andre Dubus, whose fourth collection of short fiction¹¹ earns him the title of seasoned veteran, one would not wish him to be at all other than he is. Which is also to say that he has not "developed" from the best work of his first collection, *Separate Flights*, of eight years ago. That book, like Dubus's subsequent collections, opened and/or closed with the stories that constitute his best work: "We Don't Live Here Anymore" and "Separate Flights," from the first book; "Adultery," from *Adultery and Other Choices*; "Finding a Girl in America," the title story of his third collection; and in the new one, "The Pretty Girl" and "A Father's Story." To say that he hasn't developed is not meant as a complaint, since the first in line of these works, the novella "We Don't Live Here Anymore," contains in essence all he has to "say" about life: there is man, there is woman, there is marriage and children, there is adultery and separation (or reconciliation); there is running, there is coffee and bacon and smoking in the morning; there is beer, often paced by shots of tequila and whiskey, at night. There is also, more explicitly than before—in the final story to the new collection—a Catholic, wounded, guilty sensibility:

I have said I talk with God in the mornings, as I start my day, and sometimes as I sit with coffee, looking at the birds, and the woods. Of course He has never spoken to me, but that is not something I require.

This from the man who has kept silent about a hit-and-run accident in which his daughter was involved. Divorced, having learned to live alone, he discovers an aloneness beyond the one he thought he had learned to inhabit. Of course, the "point" of "A Father's Story," as in Dubus's other work, does not consist in some truth about life, or morality, or the individual talent. More than most contemporary writers of fiction, his work is its own reward: it feels something like an offering to whatever gods have allowed him to set down the burden of what he has to say.

Dubus writes as if Hemingway and Faulkner still mattered to an American writer, and this is refreshing and intelligent. To be sure, he is very much a Man's Writer, writing out of his sense of difference from the other sex in such an expressive way that the word "macho" is shown up for the cheap cliché it is:

. . . I've known a lot of women who didn't need booze or drugs or a workout, while I've never known a man who didn't

¹¹ THE TIMES ARE NEVER SO BAD, by Andre Dubus. David R. Godine. \$13.95.

need one or the other, if not both. It would be interesting to meet one someday. So I flex into the spray, make the muscles feel closer to the hot water, but I've lost it, that feeling you get after a workout, that yesterday is gone and last night too, that today is right here in the shower, inside your body; there is nothing out there past the curtain that can bring you down, and you can take all the time you want to turn the water hotter and circle and flex and stretch under it, because the time is yours like the water is . . . it's what you lifted all that iron for, and it'll take you like a stream does a trout, cool and easy the rest of the day.

With such sensitivity is this iron-pumper, assaulter of his wife and her lover, Hemingwayish dumb-ox, endowed. But the lead story which he begins as the teller of, has room for more than the inside of his poetic head, and it moves later to a third person treatment of his wife, Polly, the "pretty girl" of its title. Dubus is the sort of inclusive consciousness that cares about pumping iron but also cares about point of view. I can't praise enough his realistic sense of place and of things Northwest of Boston, along the Merrimack, all that Catholicism and beer and sex and guilt. It is Jack Kerouac crossed by Henry James, and the result is a unique American talent which I hope continues to prosper.

Having had the temerity to couple Kerouac and James in the same sentence, let me add that although only Kerouac was fond of beer, both he and James are "poetic" novelists, for all that Kerouac's spontaneous effusions shared little with the master's studied ones. I mean that for better or worse neither novelist wrote ordinary prose, capitulated to novelese. Neither does Ron Loewinsohn, himself an accredited poet known to me through his collection from the sixties, *Meat Air* (1970) and a pamphlet-poem, *The Leaves*, three years later. In those books he revealed himself to be, like his hero William Carlos Williams, a poet of both satiric and of lyric inclinations. On occasion, as for example in his poem "Lots of Lakes," in which what he takes to be a lake turns out to be a parking lot, the inclinations nicely combine. His poems did not prepare me, however, for such a really ingenious, resourceful piece of writing as this first novel.

*Magnetic Field(s)*¹² is an elaborately planned work, consisting of three different "stories" which interweave, allude to, mirror and echo, and comment ironically upon, one another. The stories are titled "Albert," "Kindertotenleider," and "Daniel," the first two of which seem to me splendid. "Albert" takes us inside the mind of a house-thief, Albert Boone, who is really a poet in that he cares less for making off with the jewelry, the cash, the stereo, than for living into the forbidden space he has invaded. He likes to drink a beer from the absent tenant's refrigerator, or to pilfer small useless items like "a small plastic syrup bottle in the shape of a bear,"

¹² MAGNETIC FIELD(S), by Ron Loewinsohn. Knopf. \$12.95.

or to make himself some toast, carefully butter and eat it, then stab his cigarette out in the butter as "a kind of understated outrage around which the rest of the details ranged themselves." Mr. Loewinsohn makes Albert's responses totally engaging and passionate in their demands, and in a quite believable idiom, as when the thief returns to a house he has previously ripped off and this time discovers a room he'd missed the last time:

This was some kind of jackpot. But what the hell did they do in here? They must be musicians: on a white table in a corner he found lots of music paper covered with indecipherable notations that didn't even look like notes. He stood in the middle of the room and took a long pull from the beer can. This room was some kind of secret. You could hardly tell it was here from the outside because it didn't have any windows. It was hidden away in the back part of the house, back behind the laundry room, and yet it was obviously an important room. It had the same feeling as a repair garage. It was a place where work got done. But it was also like a hospital, like an operating room. The work that got done in here was highly technical, and *clean* in a way that irked him, even though he could not say why.

Here the reader discovers things too. Albert is about to make off with the swag from this small recording studio, when its owner, David Lyman, returns. The thief coolly faces him down, then attempts to make his getaway in the car, pursued by his victim:

What the hell was he doing back there? The trunk lid of course. The son of a bitch had opened the trunk and was stealing back his stuff. Albert rammed it into drive and floored it, peeling away from the man in a squeal of rubber and a blare of horns as two passing cars swerved to avoid him, the trunk lid bouncing open crazily behind him.

Then, in perhaps the finest narrative move of the book, the first story ends, and the second begins in a more detached third-person style ("When he got home . . .") as we move directly into the story of David the composer, the secret room in another house which *he* is to discover, the magnetic field(s) which draws him into that room and into the life of his predecessor in the house.

Only in the final story does the narrative become less riveting, even as the correspondences and mirrorings thicken. I have no more than begun to suggest the delightfully complex patterning of this book, which at the same time is wholly readable, lucid, varied in idiom and style. It is both solidly realistic and yet terribly literary and composed—perhaps on occasion overcomposed. But certainly a book to read more than once, and an altogether agreeable surprise of a first novel. There's a lot of talent out there, I conclude, speaking augustly from the heart of Massachusetts.

MARVIN MUDRICK

The Man of Feeling

TROLLOPE WROTE FORTY-SEVEN NOVELS, most of them Victorian triple-deckers of the length of *Anna Karenina* or *The Brothers Karamazov*; nor is the comparison frivolous or merely arithmetical, because for instance Tolstoy read and admired Trollope and was so impressed by one of those triple-deckers, *The Prime Minister*, that he called it (correctly) “a beautiful book”—a nine-hundred-page novel being beautiful only in proportion to its mastery of substantial and comprehensive issues. Trollope was a large, deliberate, uniquely prolific and copious novelist; and now, as if so very much weren’t enough, here are the five volumes of the first complete edition of his short stories¹ to prove that, when the occasion demanded, he could do more by doing less.

One such occasion was the Victorian public’s demand for its annual maintenance dose of popular sentiment, viz. the Christmas story, for which, beginning with *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens had created an appetite in the magazine-readers of the time. Trollope tended to underrate Dickens—whom in *The Warden* he caricatured under the name of Mr. Popular Sentiment—but, as a professional writer dependent on the reading public, he never underrated Dickens’ instinct for anticipating, guiding, and gratifying Victorian taste. Still, as he said in his autobiography, he disliked the “humbug” of Christmas stories and managed to gratify his readers without surrendering to it. Imagine, then, a Christmas story that ends diminuendo with small talk and no tinsel (no excitement either) among a well-off family gathered together at home in Thompson Hall on Christmas Day (no Scrooge, no ghosts, no Tiny Tim, no dreary London streets abruptly transfigured by Christmas cheer)—Christmas for grownups; but led there via as un-Christmassy a plot as possible at the very peak and climax of which an imperially respectable young British matron, in consequence of a series of her own voluntary and plausible actions, is to be discovered (by nobody but the reader, thank heaven!) at midnight, in darkness almost unrelieved by the single lighted candle, in a room of a Paris hotel, alone save for the sleeping male stranger over whose bed she leans attentively, next to whom she is about to lie

¹ ANTHONY TROLLOPE: *The Complete Short Stories*, edited and introduced by Betty Jane Slomp Breyer. I: The Christmas Stories. II: Editors and Writers. III: Tourists and Colonials. IV: Courtship and Marriage. V: Various Stories. Texas Christian University Press. \$17.50 each.

down for what's left of the night, and upon whose naked chest she has just applied a lavish and soon-to-be-fierily-effective mustard plaster that she has improvised from her handkerchief and a dollop of mustard out of the hotel restaurant's mustard-pot:

Not Priam wakened in the dead of night, not Dido when first she learned that Aeneas had fled, not Othello when he learned that Desdemona had been chaste, not Medea when she became conscious of her slaughtered children [but Trollope misremembers Euripides, whose Medea is impenitent], could have been more struck with horror than was this British matron as she stood for a moment gazing with awe on that stranger's bed. One vain, half-completed, snatching grasp she made at the handkerchief, and then drew back her hand. If she were to touch him would he not wake at once, and find her standing there in his bedroom? And then how could she explain it? By what words could she so quickly make him know the circumstances of that strange occurrence that he should accept it all before he had said a word that might offend her? For a moment she stood all but paralysed after that faint ineffectual movement of her arm. Then he stirred his head uneasily on the pillow, opened wider his lips, and twice in rapid succession snored louder than before. She started back a couple of paces, and with her body placed between him and the candle, with her face averted, but with her hand still resting on the foot of the bed, she endeavoured to think what duty required of her.

—because she's a lady, and if it weren't for her unexampled and unsharable awe (exact word) she would as a matter of course do the dutiful thing (wake him at once and inform him of her error) rather than, as in fact happens, slink off into the night and be very soon and for shockingly long thereafter punished again and again with one humiliation on the heels of another, each more horrid than the preceding, till at last the whole inexplicable perplexity can be explained away and equilibrium restored: so goes one of Trollope's Christmas stories, "Christmas at Thompson Hall," in which not a breath of humbug could have been detected by even that great hater of humbug, Ebenezer Scrooge himself before Dickens turns him into a Christmas goose.

Mrs. Brown, the virtuous young matron observed by the reader virtually *in flagrante* cheek by jowl at midnight with the naked stranger, is a characteristic Trollopean lady, though she isn't our present image of a Victorian (or Dickensian) lady in a proper fictional situation. Trollope made an extremely comfortable living writing for his Victorian readers, was pleased to please them into buying his fiction by the carload, and never wrote down to them for being, as everybody knows nowadays, prudes and hypocrites by the standards of books written a century later to describe their

hobbled and blundered "Victorian" way of life compared to the way we live now (Trollope, on the other hand, wrote a novel titled *The Way We Live Now* to describe certain deplorably modern tendencies—social climbing, place-seeking, money-grubbing—in Victorian life). Trollope's ladies are first of all women; and Mrs. Brown doesn't faint or fail, she's awed to think just how awful a fix she's in, how futile and suspect would be any account of it she might give to the stranger or the night porter or her husband, how irrefutably intimate are those snores and that manly chest (guilty! like Shakespeare's villain sneaking into the heroine's bed-chamber in the dead of night to spy out for heinous purposes the precise location of the birthmark on her snowy bosom). In another of the Christmas stories, one of "The Two Heroines of Plumplington" discusses with her fiancé their imminent nuptials:

"Then, Jack, you shall have a kiss. . . . Jack, are you not the happiest young man in all Plumplington?"

"How about the happiest young woman," said Jack.

"Well; I don't mind owning up. I am. But it's for your sake. I could have waited, and not have been a bit impatient. But it's so different with a man. . . ."

And Trollope's women quite know why it's so different (some aren't even shy about owning up), and rather enjoy the idea: the power they have versus the power they resist or yield to or invite. There is power on either side, moving in and out of balance: the hero of "Christmas Day at Kirkby Cottage" suddenly realizes he's hooked when the girl whom he hasn't till this moment identified as the girl of his dreams "assumed that look of which he was already afraid"; but there are sure to be recoveries, overpowering looks from the opposite direction, shifts, new weakenings.

It's no surprise to a reader of any Trollope novel that Trollope is fascinated by women in an altogether un-Victorian ("modern") way: they aren't gifts or rewards, they're obstacles and temptations, sources of energy and centers of consciousness, sexual objects and subjects, emblems and agents of opportunity, they know perfectly well what the score is, they walk right in and take part and often take over—nobody who has read the Palliser novels would ever mistake Lady Glencora for a haze of sentiment or the resident doormat at Gatherum Castle. What, however, distinguishes the short stories is an interest in the power of women so persistent and concentrated that sometimes it almost amounts to the whole story. Trollope may be said to be giving himself away: they're always Topic A for him, but in his short fiction he can let himself go because here he can take a holiday from the big and engrossing male issues—politics and war, commerce, the Church, making one's mark in the world—which nineteenth-century readers expected at least the male novelists to cover in their triple-

decker novels. Of course the power of women is relative, even at its most passive it challenges and defines the susceptibility of men, especially *some* men, indeed some men at any age whatever, as in "Mary Gresley" Trollope (who wrote it when he was fifty-four) makes explicit with a nervous and defensive paragraph of personal digression disguised as literary history:

Sterne, in his latter days, when very near his end, wrote passionate love-letters to various women, and has been called hard names by Thackeray,—not for writing them, but because he thus showed himself to be incapable of that sincerity which should have bound him to one love. We [Trollope usually speaks for himself; but in the *Editors and Writers* stories he adopts the—unfortunate—editorial "we"] do not ourselves much admire the sentimentalism of Sterne, finding the expression of it to be mawkish, and thinking that too often he misses the pathos for which he strives from a want of appreciation on his own part of that which is really vigorous in language and touching in sentiment. But we think that Thackeray has been somewhat wrong in throwing that blame on Sterne's heart which should have been attributed to his taste. The love which he declared when he was old and sick and dying,—a worn out wreck of a man,—disgusts us, not because it was felt, or not felt, but because it was told;—and told as though the teller meant to offer more than that warmth of sympathy which woman's strength and woman's weakness combined will ever produce in the hearts of certain men. This is a sympathy with which neither age, nor crutches, nor matrimony, nor position of any sort need consider itself to be incompatible. It is unreasoning, and perhaps irrational. It gives to outward form and grace that which only inward merit can deserve. It is very dangerous because, unless watched, it leads to words which express that which is not intended. But, though it may be controlled, it cannot be killed. He, who is of his nature open to such impression, will feel it while breath remains to him. It was that which destroyed the character and happiness of Swift, and which made Sterne contemptible. We do not doubt that such unreasoning sympathy, exacted by feminine attraction, was always strong in Johnson's heart;—but Johnson was strong all over, and could guard himself equally from misconduct and from ridicule. Such sympathy with women, such incapability of withstanding the feminine magnet was very strong with Goethe,—who could guard himself from ridicule, but not from misconduct. . . .

In other words they send Trollope up the wall, he can't stop thinking about them, he's always in love with several and ready for more, visions of sugarplums dance in his head, and there's never the shadow of a doubt about what he really wants for Christmas.

The man who in his autobiography passed himself off to superfi-

cial readers as a literary accountant and perpetual writing machine was a man of feeling: "He was a quick-tempered man [the editor quotes Julian Hawthorne's recollection], and the ardour and hurry of his temperament made him seem more so . . . but he was never more angry than he was forgiving and generous. He was hurt by little things, and little things pleased him; he was suspicious and perverse, but in a manner that rather endeared him to you than otherwise." Passion notices little things. Passion carries all before it, and—though in his short stories it's so much more focused and less complicated than in his novels that sometimes not just one but all five of these volumes appear to solicit the title *Courtship and Marriage*—though it directs and dominates it doesn't fail to notice nuances, peculiarities, disjunctions and qualifications, grace notes. All of which abound in one of the best of the stories, which is also particularly affecting to members of the Trollope fan-club because its hero is so unconcealed a version of Trollope himself: shrewd and inquisitive world traveler, last-gasp romantic and lover of women, John-Bull Englishman among the china teacups. "I am an Englishman," begins "John Bull on the Guadalquivir"—courtliest and most romantic of the stories of courtship and marriage, but included here in the volume *Tourists and Colonials*—"living, as all Englishmen should do, in England, and my wife would not, I think, be well pleased were any one to insinuate that she were other than an Englishwoman; but in the circumstances of my marriage I became connected with the south of Spain, and the narrative which I am about to tell requires that I should refer to some of those details." One of the charms of the story is its forwardness to disclose the good news right away, its lack of customary suspense. As John Bull, a.k.a. John Pomfret, lets us know in the very first sentence, he is recollecting it in happy tranquillity, long after the events, his wife "now sitting on the other side of the fireplace with a legion of small linen habiliments in a huge basket by her side"; the very last sentence of the story assures us that, despite his early misgivings, Maria has turned out to be the girl of his dreams: "From that day in which I ascended the Giralda to this present day in which I write, I have never once had occasion to complain of a deficiency of romance either in Maria Daguiar or in Maria Pomfret"; and between first and last the narrative itself is a continuously self-clarifying accumulation of evidence that by the time he offers his assurance has already verified it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Maria is half-Spanish and half-English, but brought up in Spain. Their fathers are "in trade together," and it's a more or less tacit international agreement that in due time they will marry. When at seventeen Maria visits England they meet and John is overwhelmed: she's so beautiful, intelligent, and amiable that not only can't John help falling in love with her, he's compelled against his tight-little-island preconceptions to learn in the course of his eventual courtship visit to Spain a great deal about foreigners and

their mysterious ways. "Maria, even at . . . [seventeen], had about her a quiet, sustained decision of character quite unlike anything I had seen in English girls." When during her stay in England he proposes, she replies that "she was not prepared with an answer; she had only known me six weeks, and wanted more time to think about it." John's father suggests a year's separation, "and Maria, in the calmest voice, protested that she thought it very wise. I should be less of a boy by that time, she said, smiling at me, but driving wedges between every fibre of my body as she spoke. . . . 'And, John, you still have the trade to learn,' she added with her deliciously foreign intonation—speaking very slowly, but with perfect pronunciation"; "when she took leave of us, she put her face up to be kissed by me, as she did by my father, and seemed to receive as much emotion from one embrace as from the other. 'He'll go out by the packet of the 1st of April,' said my father, speaking of me as though I were a bale of goods. 'Ah, that will be so nice,' said Maria, settling her dress in the carriage; 'the oranges will be ripe for him then!'"

When at length John arrives in Spain he is met by an old family friend; in a few days they board a steamer en route for Seville and the two entirely well-intentioned English tourists take in the sights, among which is a man "dressed in a fashion that, to my eyes, was equally strange and picturesque":

He was a man of about fifty, but as active, apparently, as though not much more than twenty-five; he was of low stature, but of admirable make; his hair was just becoming grizzled, but was short and crisp, and well cared-for; his face was prepossessing, having a a look of good humour added to courtesy, and there was a pleasant, soft smile round his mouth which ingratiated one at the first sight. But it was his dress rather than his person which attracted attention. He wore the ordinary Andalusian cap—of which such hideous parodies are now making themselves common in England—but was not contented with the usual ornament of the double tuft. The cap was small and jaunty; trimmed with silk velvet—as is common here with men careful to adorn their persons; but this man's cap was finished off with a jewelled button and golden filigree work. He was dressed in a short jacket with a stand-up collar; and that also was covered with golden buttons and with golden buttonholes. It was all gilt down the front, and all lace down the back. . . .

Dress any Englishman in such a garb as this and he will at once give you the idea of a hog in armour. In the first place, he will lack the proper spirit to carry it off; and in the next place, the motion of his limbs will disgrace the ornaments they bear. "And so best," most Englishmen will say. Very likely; and, therefore, let no Englishman try it. But my Spaniard did not look at all like a hog in armour. . . .

So far, not so bad. But soon John's friend, drawing on his year or two's experience of Spain, decides the dandy must be a bull-fighter: asks him in Spanish about his finery; the two Englishmen finger his gold buttons and talk freely (in English, in front of the monkey cage, because monkeys can't understand English): "'I wonder what the whole set would cost?' said I. 'An enormous deal of money for a fellow like him, I should think!'"'; and "'I was emboldened to hold up his arm that I might see the cut of his coat, to take off his cap and examine the make, to stuff my finger beneath his sash, and at last to kneel down while I persuaded him to hold up his legs that I might look to the clocking of the stocking . . .,'" and even contrives to rip off one of the buttons.

Once John gets to Seville, he's again discomfited by Maria's ease and cheerfulness: "it seemed as though she were in no way embarrassed" as a respectable *English* girl would have been at their reunion. "So felt I then, pining for something to make me unhappy." He's discomfited also by the liberty of manner with which she strolls through the city, greeting men friends in the streets "with an animation she had never displayed in her conversations with me"; moreover "'I was not allowed to take her arm, and thus to appropriate her as I should have done in England. 'No, John,' she said, with the sweetest, prettiest smile, 'we don't do that here; only when people are married.' And she made this allusion to married life, out, openly, and with not the slightest tremor on her tongue." Astonishing! but not to Maria: "It is just a custom, you know." When they climb to the cathedral tower, the Giralda, for a view of the city, they are vigorously debating English versus Spanish behavior: John having spoken for the British, "'In the affairs of business, yes,'" said Maria, with a look of firm confidence in her own opinion—that look of confidence she has never lost, and I pray that she may never lose it while I remain with her—but in the little intercourses of the world, no! A Spaniard never forgets what is personally due either to himself or to his neighbours. If he is eating an onion, he eats it as an onion should be eaten.'" And so she turns naturally to the latest news about her friend the Marquis d'Almavivas, who as he has already told her "enjoyed the joke" of having had two incredibly rude and provincial Englishmen "pull him about and tear his clothes" on the steamer to Seville just the other day. John, who at this point is ready to take the next balloon back to England, confesses; and moments later he is confronted by the Marquis himself, also visiting the cathedral tower:

"Señor," said Maria, after the first words of greeting had been spoken between them, "you must permit me to present to you my father's most particular friend—and my own, Mr. Pomfret; John, this is the Marquis d'Almavivas."

I cannot now describe the grace with which this introduction

was effected, or the beauty of her face as she uttered the words. There was a boldness about her as though she had said out loud, "I know it all—the whole story. But, in spite of that, you must take him on my representation, and be gracious to him in spite of what he has done. You must be content to do that; or in quarrelling with him you must quarrel with me also." And it was done at the spur of the moment—without delay. She, who not five minutes since had been loudly condemning the unknown Englishman for his rudeness, had already pardoned him, now that he was known to be her friend, and had determined that he should be pardoned by others also, or that she would share his disgrace. I recognised the nobleness of this at the moment; but, nevertheless, I was so sore that I would almost have preferred that she should have disowned me.

The exchange that follows between Spaniard and Englishman is completely worthy of the lady who has introduced them:

"I have already had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman," he said; "we had some conversation in the boat together."

"Yes," said I, pointing to his coat, "and you still bear the marks of our encounter."

"Was it not delightful, Donna Maria," he continued, turning to her; "your friend's friend took me for a torero?"

"And it served you properly, señor," said Donna Maria, laughing; "you have no right to go about with all those rich ornaments upon you."

"Oh! quite properly; indeed, I make no complaint; and I must beg your friend to understand, and his friend also, how grateful I am for their solicitude as to my pecuniary welfare. They were inclined to be severe on me for being so extravagant in such trifles. I was obliged to explain that I had no wife at home kept without her proper allowance of dresses, in order that I might be gay."

"They are foreigners, and you should forgive their error," said she.

"And in token that I do so," said the marquis, "I shall beg your friend to accept the little ornament which attracted his attention." And, so saying, he pulled the identical button out of his pocket, and gracefully proffered it to me.

"I shall carry it about with me always," said I, accepting it, "as a memento of humiliation. When I look at it, I shall ever remember the folly of an Englishman and the courtesy of a Spaniard."

Nonetheless, despite his heroic efforts at saving face and the honor of England, John is still in a funk when they leave the Marquis and in silence descend the tower steps back into the Cathedral:

Well, my dream of Spanish love must be over. But I was sure of this: that having known her, and given her my heart, I could never afterwards share it with another.

We came out at last on to the dark, gloomy aisle of the Cathedral, and walked together without a word up along the side of a choir, till we came to the transept. There was not a soul near us, and not a sound was to be heard but the distant, low pattering of a mass, then in course of celebration at some far-off chapel in the Cathedral. When we got to the transept, Maria turned a little, as though she was going to the transept door, and then stopped herself. She stood still; and when I stood also, she made two steps towards me, and put her hand on my arm. "Oh, John!" she said.

"Well," said I, "after all, it does not much signify. You can make a joke of it when my back is turned."

"Dearest John!"—she had never spoken to me in that way before—"you must not be angry with me. It is better that we should explain to each other, is it not?"

"Oh, much better. I am very glad you heard of it at once. I do not look at it quite in the same light that you do; but nevertheless—"

"What do you mean? But I know you are angry with me. And yet you cannot think that I intended those words for you. Of course I know now that there was nothing rude in what passed."

"Oh, but there was."

"No, I am sure there was not. You could not be rude, though you are so free-hearted. I see it all now, and so does the marquis. You will like him so much when you come to know him. Tell me that you won't be cross with me for what I have said. Sometimes I think that I have displeased you, and yet my whole wish has been to welcome you to Seville, and to make you comfortable as an old friend. Promise me that you will not be cross with me."

Cross with her! I certainly had no intention of being cross; but I had begun to think that she would not care what my humour might be. "Maria," I said, taking hold of her hand.

"No, John, do not do that. It is in the church, you know."

"Maria, will you answer me a question?"

"Yes," she said, very slowly, looking down upon the stone slabs beneath our feet.

"Do you love me?"

But that's a question that after a bit of velvet-glove sparring she makes clear she doesn't intend to answer here and now: "Remember, John, we are in the church; and poor papa will be waiting breakfast." Besides, as Maria knows, it's a question that will take a lifetime to answer.

Another of the best stories is "The Panjandrum," about six neophyte writers who plan to set up a new magazine, "not because we were good at writing or editing, but because we had ideas which we wished to promulgate. Or it might be the case with some of us that we only thought we had ideas. But there was certainly present to us all a great wish to do some good." Things do not run smoothly, there are disagreements and disappointments in the strained and protracted (and lifelike and absorbing) discussions among the partners; the young narrator is unable to produce any words at all (not to mention ideas) for his first contribution, and after days of hopeless barrenness goes out for a walk in a rainy London park:

I saw before me on the pathway a stout woman,—apparently middle-aged, but her back was towards me,—leading a girl who might perhaps be ten or eleven years old. They had come up one of the streets from the New Road to the Park, and were hurrying along so fast that the girl, who held the woman by the arm, was almost running. The woman was evidently a servant, but in authority,—an upper nurse perhaps, or a housekeeper. Why she should have brought her charge out in the rain was a mystery; but I could see from the elasticity of the child's step that she was happy and very eager. She was a well-made girl, with long well-rounded legs, which came freely down beneath her frock, with strong firm boots, a straw hat, and a plaid shawl wound carefully round her throat and waist. As I followed them those rapid legs of hers seemed almost to twinkle in their motion as she kept pace with the stout woman who was conducting her. The mud was all over her stockings; but still there was about her an air of well-to-do comfort which made me feel that the mud was no more than a joke. Every now and then I caught something of a glimpse of her face as she half turned herself round in talking to the woman. I could see, or at least I could fancy that I saw that she was fair, with large round eyes and soft light brown hair. . . . At last I resolved that I would pass them and have one look at her,—and I did so. It put me to my best pace to do it, but gradually I overtook them and could hear that the girl never ceased talking as she ran. As I went by them I distinctly heard her words, "Oh, Anne, I do so wonder what he's like!" "You'll see, miss," said Anne. I looked back and saw that she was exactly as I had thought,—a fair, strong, healthy girl, with round eyes and large mouth, broad well-formed nose, and light hair. Who was the "he," as to whom her anxiety was so great,—the "he" whom she was tripping along through the rain and mud to see, and kiss and love, and wonder at? And why hadn't she been taken in a cab? Would she be allowed to take off those very dirty stockings before she was introduced to

her new-found brother, or wrapped in the arms of her stranger-father?

He has discovered what, if he is to be a writer, he prefers to ideas: fiction, such as the story he will write about the girl (discreetly aged a few years for dramatic purposes) in the park, and he goes back to his room to write it: "I doubt whether any five days in my life were ever happier than those which were devoted to this piece of work." It's the end of the magazine of ideas, and the beginning of the novelist.

MICHAEL GORRA

The Apostle of Common Sense

IN 1850 ANTHONY TROLLOPE WROTE FROM HIS HOME in County Cork to his mother, asking her and his older brother Tom:

... to make out six lists each containing thirteen names, modern or ancient (Biblical characters excluded) of the following persons:—

1. Great men; i.e. men who have moved the world, not literary or scientific merely. 2. Great women. 3. Men of genius. 4. Great Captains. 5. Great Rebels. 6. Statesmen. Ask Theodosia to make a list also. I have got different people to do so, and then I [?shall] see how they all tally together.¹

A few weeks later Trollope quarrels with his brother's choices, and notes that Caesar, "the greatest man who ever lived," isn't among the seven unanimously voted—"Shakespeare, Mahomet, Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Richelieu, Pitt, and Wolsey." One recognizes the country-dweller's need to invent his own excitement. Trollope's parlor game by mail could provide the excuse for a dozen letters (enough to get him through a couple of evenings, at any rate) quite aside from the pedestrian pleasures of waiting for the mail and tallying the results. But even in the wake of Carlyle's *On*

¹ THE LETTERS OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE, edited by N. John Hall. Stanford University Press. Two volumes, \$85.00 the set.

Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, it seems a silly pastime for a thirty-five-year-old novelist. One can imagine Thackeray's sneer, or Eliot's indifference; Austen could be persuaded to participate in such a game, but one can't imagine her initiating one, except for the amusement of her nieces and nephews. Only Trollope would so complacently accept the ordinary amusements of the middle class.

Yet Trollope wasn't an ordinary man—and how strange it is to have to say that about a great novelist. His reputation for most of the century since his death in 1882 has, however, been so much that of the novelist as Philistine that one must insist upon what was extraordinary about him. In his obituary essay, which sets the terms within or against which virtually all Trollope criticism works, Henry James says that Trollope's work is marked by its "complete appreciation of the usual"—by his willingness to take daily life at face value and his ability to be fascinated by it. But to "appreciate" something is not the same thing as to be part of it, however much one apes its surfaces. Trollope's zest, as a man and a novelist, for the ordinary life of his class stems from the fact that until he was twenty-six he was almost entirely excluded from that life.

His entire childhood was as traumatic as Dickens' brief experience in the blacking warehouse. His father was a barrister so fractious that he couldn't keep a client; Trollope received a gentleman's education at Winchester and Harrow without having either the clothes or the pocket-money to make a public school bearable. At Winchester his brother beat him daily. At Harrow he was a day boy—and walked three miles home to lunch to save the cost of eating at school. He was dirty, bad both at games and the classics, big, lazy, and awkward, and like all such boys, as he says in his *Autobiography*, "coveted popularity with a covetousness that was almost mean." He knew, moreover, that he was his mother's least favorite son, so that to the "disgrace" of his education was added the belief that he "had been looked upon always as an evil, an encumbrance, a useless thing,—as a creature of whom those connected with him had to be ashamed." Eventually Mrs. Trollope noticed him enough to get him a job as a post-office clerk in London, where he floundered for six years, so that his superiors jumped to get rid of him when in 1841 he asked to be appointed to a new job in Ireland.

There he got a start as fresh and new as any immigrant ever had: got married, made friends, wrote three novels (admittedly unsuccessful ones), and began the love-affair with fox-hunting that provided the material for some of his best scenes. He restructured the postal routes in Ireland, and then in 1851 his superiors gave him the boon that showed him his subject, and made him a great novelist. He was assigned to reorganize mail delivery in the west of England. It took two years and required him to visit every house in his district. And at the end of those years he had Barset-

shire. As a schoolboy he had told himself stories to make life bearable, always with himself as hero—spun a serial in his head that lasted for years, and so taught himself “to live in a world altogether outside the world of my own material circumstances.” Most children who do this escape to a fantasy-land, but Trollope’s fantasy was of the mundane, from which he had been “kept in estrangement.” He bound his daydreams by “certain proportions, and proprieties, and unities” as to realistic probability, so that he “never became a king or a duke . . . But I was a very clever person, and beautiful women used to be fond of me.” Dickens never got used to the blacking warehouse; it remained an ever-present shock to his sensibility. But Trollope had gotten used to being a pariah, and so for him the ordinary life in which one was accepted as a good fellow never lost its novelty.

His private serial provided a model for the way in which, when he learned “to lay my own identity aside,” Trollope would carry characters and subplots from book to book, making major characters in *Doctor Thorne* (1858) minor ones in *Framley Parsonage* (1861), or allowing the problems of fox-hunting in Trumpeton Wood to stretch throughout the Palliser novels. One understands his impulse toward fiction, but the results of that impulse seem to me one of the great mysteries of the creative life. When Trollope began to write *The Warden* in 1853, he knew nothing of cathedral towns except what he had learned by passing through them, and very little of clergymen. What made his dream of the real so substantial? How was he able to make it live so vividly for others?

Trollope’s greatness rests upon his vision of his characters’ relationship to the rules of their society. A standard criticism of the Barsetshire novels has been that they show clergymen only in their social, and not in their divine roles; against the Palliser novels that they have nothing to do with the ideological motivations of politicians, but only with their social relations to one another, and to the women around them. Such criticism is both right and beside the point. Trollope’s imagination is exclusively social. He can’t see people outside of their society—can’t imagine why one would want to. “I judge a man by his actions with men,” he wrote to the Australian historian G. W. Rusden in 1876, “much more than by his declarations Godwards.” Neither God nor Nature nor an abstract moral code play a part in his world. Politics in Trollope is a social activity, a means not of carrying some program but of ensuring that men can live with one another in reasonable harmony. It is pragmatic, not ideological, and the greatest sin a politician can commit is to pretend—like Mr. Daubeny in *Phineas Redux* (1874), the Conservative who wishes to disestablish the Church of England—that one has an ideological reason for a program whose entire motivation is the pragmatic one of staying in office. In *The Prime Minister* (1876), Plantagenet Palliser, Duke of Omnium, thinks his ministry a failure because it hasn’t accomplished any-

thing. But to Trollope that's just the point. The country required no great measure. By carrying on the routine business of the Queen's Government, Palliser has served his country well. In such a world ideals are a handicap. One can, however, make too much of this, and turn Trollope into Thackeray by concentrating on the depressing aspect which that vision wears when pressed against in certain ways. But he's not Thackeray. He has no loss of innocence to mourn, no shock of outrage at the world's imperfections, because he never assumed it could be otherwise. His theme, as Clara Claiborne Park² has argued, is how to live in a flawed world without letting those flaws greatly bother one. Of all the major Victorian novelists, he is the most critical of his society's conventional beliefs, and yet the most affirmative of his society as a whole. Far more than Thackeray or Dickens, who make their characters fit a scheme, or than Eliot, who always drives beyond hers to some great truth, Trollope attempts to understand his people upon their own terms. Their situations can't be entirely contained within or described by convention, even when they themselves believe in the convention in question. What Trollope has to an extraordinary degree is the combination of judgment and compassion, the ability to accept the general case—the need for rules, tradition, even for ideals—while rejecting any specific convention that may strangle the life of an individual character.

It is a difficult equilibrium to maintain. Some of Trollope's early novels stray into a too-easy acceptance of conventional prejudice, and some of his last books find so many specific instances of the need for individual freedom that there's barely a general case for the necessity of convention left to balance against them. The creative tension between affirmation and criticism is most marked in the Palliser novels. In *Phineas Redux* Trollope places Phineas Finn on trial for the murder of a fellow M.P., Mr. Bonteen, with whom he's had a quarrel. Phineas insists on the necessity of telling the truth: he didn't do it. But his lawyer, Mr. Chaffanbrass, says that the truth is irrelevant. If Phineas is hanged, it won't be because he's killed Mr. Bonteen, but because the evidence presented in the trial will have proved that he did so. The truth doesn't matter; what does are the various constructions that can be placed upon the evidence. Phineas hasn't committed the murder, but his eventual acquittal depends not on other people believing his word, but upon demonstrating that someone else did it. None of his friends believe that it's likely he killed Mr. Bonteen, but even his mentor, Mr. Monk, believes that it's possible. After the trial, Mr. Monk says:

"... there was always sufficient possibility of your guilt to prevent a rational man from committing himself to the expression

² "Trollope and the Modern Reader," *Massachusetts Review*, 3 (1961-2).

of an absolute conviction . . . I can see that I offend you by saying so,—but if you will think of it, I must be right. You were on your trial; and I as your friend was bound to await the result,—with much confidence, because I knew you; but with no conviction, because both you and I are human and fallible.”

The only characters who fully believe in Phineas’ innocence before the trial are those who love him—and believing something out of love is very different from believing in the truth of a gentleman’s word. Phineas, however, believes in ideals, in truth; in *Phineas Finn* (1869) he has given up his Parliamentary seat and £2000 a year as Undersecretary of the Colonies for the sake of them. But the world has no patience with ideals, whatever it professes, and Mr. Monk’s speech shows that it is right to have none. After his acquittal Phineas retreats into an outraged innocence—but by the end of the novel he has emerged from his refuge to accept his place in a society whose claim to believe in truth, honor, and integrity vanishes as soon as the social fabric is rent by Mr. Bonteen’s murder. Yet what James called Trollope’s “love of a comfortable ending” doesn’t seem to me subverted by Phineas’ new knowledge of human fallibility and the weakness of the social structure. Trollope is too much the apostle of common sense to cry over what can’t be helped, a man not disillusioned but without illusions from the start. His lesson is the necessary acceptance of the world’s imperfections—necessary because one can really do nothing about them, and if one works, like the Liberals whose faith Trollope shared, towards alleviating those imperfections, one should have no real hope of ultimately succeeding. At the end of the novel Phineas has a good marriage, a safe seat in Parliament, the prospect of a Cabinet post (fulfilled in *The Prime Minister*), and a comfortable fortune. And Trollope implies, moreover, that by learning to live in an imperfect world he has finally become an adult. He is a much different man from the political swashbuckler of *Phineas Finn*, and a better one.

For people in Trollope can change for the better. In *The Duke’s Children* (1880), Palliser, with infinite reluctance, allows his heir, Lord Silverbridge, to marry an American, and lets his daughter marry a commoner, Frank Tregear. But even if one feels that Silverbridge is frivolous and inconsistent, and Tregear too aggressively self-possessed, one can’t regret the Duke’s forced reconciliation to his times. He may be a better man than either of the young men to whose will he accedes, but one has to remember him as a young man as well—as an infinitely dry and consequently silly would-be adulterer in *The Small House at Allington* (1864)—and to admit that both his son and his son-in-law have the same potential to grow. Trollope reveals his characters over time, allowing one scene to recall another in a novel written a dozen years before—nowhere more than in *The Duke’s Children*. He wrote in

his *Autobiography* that he had no hope that his readers would read the Palliser novels consecutively, in order to understand the way his characters change; his "canvas" was "too wide" for him to expect any reader "to trouble himself to look at it as a whole." Nowadays few readers do otherwise. No volume in the series is so finely and subtly wrought as *Middlemarch* or *Vanity Fair*. But as James said, Trollope is better *en masse*, and his sustained and slowly developing portrait of a society seems to me as great an achievement as that of any Victorian novelist.

In the midst of that achievement what remained of Trollope's early "disgrace" was the need to prove himself, over and over, through the hard work of which everyone had imagined him incapable. His life was dominated by work—thirty years in the Post Office and forty-seven novels, all but a handful of them coming after he was forty. What this superbly-annotated edition of his letters does best is to clarify his attitude toward that work. He cared deeply about his books' financial success—and yet he didn't care so deeply about it as some have thought. In the letter to Rusden from which I've already quoted, Trollope writes that:

You ask me whether I would have willingly written for money any thing which would have been prejudicial to a reader. The same test may be given to a shoe maker. His primary object is a living. But if he be an honest man he will prefer a poor living by good shoes, to a good living by bad shoes. It is the same with the authors . . .

Trollope loved to compare the novelist and the shoemaker, but his comparison doesn't bespeak a simple desire for large sales and a good price for an article manufactured according to pattern—even if he did write 1000 words an hour, with his watch open on the table before him. He liked money but he knew it wasn't enough. His satire on the "commercial profligacy" of his age, *The Way We Live Now* (1875), isn't fueled by his characters' love of money *per se*, but by the fact that they aren't good shoemakers about it—want it without doing good work for it, and will use a variety of dishonest means to get it. Trollope wrote novels for ten years before he made much more than the cost of paper and postage, and late in his life he wrote, with more pique than was usual for him to his brother-in-law, John Tilley, that "You say of me;—that I would not choose to write novels unless I were paid. Most certainly I would;—much rather than not write them at all." Hard work was essential to him. "No man enjoys life more than I do," he wrote to Rusden, "but no man dreads more than I do the time when life may not be enjoyable"—the time when "the power of work be over with me." In 1881, suffering from asthma, a hernia, the first twinges of angina, and the partial paralysis of his writing

hand, he said in a letter to his brother Tom that “the time has come upon me of which I have often spoken to you, in which I should know that it were better that I were dead.” But he continued to write, and he had just one year to wait. He had a stroke in November 1882 and died a month later without recovering enough to realize he could no longer work. It was a happy end to a life so “violently improbable” in its bounty that the young Trollope would have rejected it from his private serial immediately.

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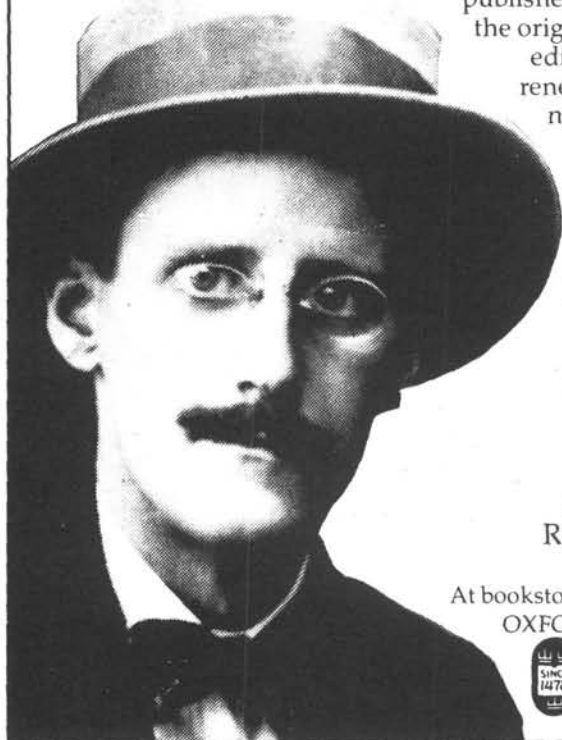
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IN THIS ISSUE:

Modern professional boxing in its traceable history was a product of Britain; boxing in its course to its present identity is not just Western, not simply American, but particularly Anglo-Saxon. It should come as a surprise to no one, knowing modern prizefighting's national and racial origins, that the sport extols most simply and directly the values that the Anglo-Saxon male has historically cherished most: the indomitable will of the individual, aggressive conquest, and contempt for humiliation and submission. The minority male, in becoming like the paradigmatic, mythological Anglo-Saxon male, wears a kind of white face.

—Gerald Early on prizefighting, p. 656

When the scales fall from our eyes, he said, we can see that the technology of recording creates conditions that can lift the musical experience above the limitations imposed on it by the concert hall. The recording studio can uniquely provide the performer—and ultimately, the listener—with the music alone, freed of the blemishes that time, place, and circumstance inevitably inflict: the performer's grimaces and grunts (or his vocal obbligato), the lady's red hat two rows ahead, the coughing and candy-wrapper rattling, and the gentle whirl of the illicit tape recorder that hamper concentration in the concert hall are obviated.

—Robert S. Clark on Glenn Gould, p. 699